

HELEN REDEEMED

AND OTHER POEMS

MAURICE HEWLETT

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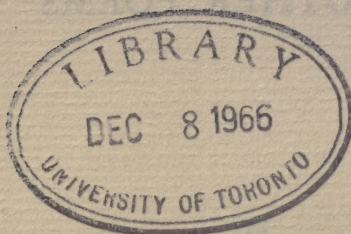
BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

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DEDICATION

LOVE owes tribute unto Death,
Being but a flower of breath,
Ev'n as thy fair body is
Moment's figure of the bliss
Dwelling in the mind of God
When He called thee from the sod,
Like a crocus up to start,
Gray-eyed with a golden heart,
Out of earth, and point our sight
To thy eternal home of light.

Here on earth is all we know :
To let our love as steadfast blow,
Open-hearted to the sun,
Folded down when our day's done,
As thy flower that bids it be
Flower of thy charity.
'Tis not ours to boast or pray
Breath from us shall outlive clay ;
'Tis not thine, thou Pitiful,
Set me task beyond my rule.

Yet as young men carve on trees
Lovely names, and find in these
Solace in the after time,
So to have hid thee in my rhyme
Shall be comfort when I take
The lonely road. Then, for my sake,
Keep thou this my graven sigh,
And, that I may not all die,
Open it, and hear it tell,
Here was one who loved thee well.

October 6, 1912.



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NOTE

THREE of the Poems here published have appeared in book form already, in the Volume called *Songs and Meditations*, long out of print.

HELEN REDEEMED

PROEM

SING of the end of Troy, and of that flood
Of passion by the blood
Of heroes consecrate, by poet's craft
Hallowed, if that thin waft
Of godhead blown upon thee stretch thy song
To span such store of strong
And splendid vision of immortal themes
Late harvested in dreams,
Albeit long years laid up in tilth. Most
meet

Thou sing that slim and sweet
Fair woman for whose bosom and delight
Paris, as well he might,
Wrought all the woe, and held her to his cost
And Troy's, and won and lost
Perforce ; for who could look on her or feel
Her near and not dare steal
One hour of her, or hope to hold in bars
Such wonder of the stars
Undimmed ? As soon expect to cage the rose

Of dawn which comes and goes
Fitful, or leash the shadows of the hills,
Or music of upland rills
As Helen's beauty and not tarnish it
With thy poor market wit,
Adept to hue the wanton in the wild,
Defile the undefiled !
Yet by the oath thou swearest, standing high
Where piled rocks testify
The holy dust, and from Therapnai's hold
Over the rippling wold
Didst look upon Amyklai's, where sunrise
First dawned in Helen's eyes,
Take up thy tale, good poet, strain thine art
To sing her rendered heart,
Given last to him who loved her first, nor
swerved
From loving, but was nerved
To see through years of robbery and shame
Her spirit, a clear flame,
Eloquent of her birthright. Tell his peace,
And hers who at last found ease
In white-arm'd Heré, holy husbander
Of purer fire than e'er
To wife gave Kypris. Helen, and Thee I
sing
In whom her beauties ring,
Fair body of fair mind fair acolyte,
Star of my day and night !

18th September 1912.

FIRST STAVE

THE DEATH OF ACHILLES

WHERE Simoeis and Xanthos, holy streams,
Flow brimming on the level, and chance
gleams

Betray far Ida through a rended cloud
And hint the awful home of Zeus, whose
shroud

The thunder is—'twixt Ida and the main
Behold gray Ilios, Priam's fee, the plain
About her like a carpet ; from whose height
The watchman, ten years watching, every
night

Counteth the beacon fires and sees no less
Their number as the years wax and duress
Of hunger thins the townsmen day by day—
More than the Greeks kill plague and famine
slay.

Here in their wind-swept city, ten long
years

Beset and in this tenth in blood and tears
And havocry to fall, old Priam's sons

Guard still their gods, their wives and little
ones,

Guard Helen still, for whose fair womanhood
The sin was done, woe wrought, and all the
blood

Of Danaan and Dardan in their pride
Shed ; nor yet so the end, for Heré cried
Shrill on the heights more vengeance on
wrong done,

And Greek or Trojan paid it. Late or soon
By sword or bitter arrow they went hence,
Each with their goodliest paying one man's
offence.

Goodliest in Troy fell Hector ; back to Greek
Then swung the doomstroke, and to Dis the
bleak

Must pass great Hector's slayer. Zeus on
high,

Hidden from men, held up the scales ; the
sky

Told Thetis that her son must go the way
He sent Queen Hecuba's—himself must pay,
Himself though young, splendid Achilles' self,
The price of manslaying, with blood for pelf.

A grief immortal took her, and she grieved
Deep in sea-cave, wherever restless heaved
The wine-dark ocean—silently, not moving,
Tearless, a god. O Gods, however loving,
That is a lonely grief that must go dry
About the graves where the beloved lie,
And knows too much to doubt if death ends all

Pleasure in strength of limb, joy musical,
Mother-love, maiden-love, which never more
Must the dead look for on the further shore
Of Acheron, and past the willow-wood
Of Proserpine !

But when he understood,
Achilles, that his end was near at hand,
Darkling he heard the news, and on the strand
Beyond the ships he stood awhile, then cried
The Sea-God that high-hearted and clear-eyed
He might go down ; and this for utmost
grace

He asked, that not by battle might his face
Be marred, nor fighting might some Dardan
best

Him who had conquered ever. For the rest,
Fate, which had given, might take, as fate
should be.

So prayed he, and Poseidon out of the sea,
There where the deep blue into sand doth
fade

And the long wave rolls in, a bar of jade,
Sent him a portent in that sea-blue bird
Swifter than light, the halcyon ; and men
heard

The trumpet of his praise : " Shaker of Earth,
Hail to thee ! Now I fare to death in mirth,
As to a banquet ! "

So when day was come
Lightly arose the prince to meet his doom,
And kissed Briseïs where she lay abed

And never more by hers might rest his head :
"Farewell, my dear, farewell, my joy," said
he ;

"Farewell to all delights 'twixt thee and me !
For now I take a road whose harsh alarms
Forbid so sweet a burden to my arms."

Then his clean limbs his weeping squires
bedight

In all the mail Hephaistos served his might
Withal, of breastplate shining like the sun
Upon flood-water, three-topped helm whereon
Gleamed the gold basilisk, and goodly greaves.
These bore he without word ; but when from
sheaves

Of spears they picked the great ash Pelian
Poseidon gave to Peleus, God to a man,
For no man's manège else—than all men's
fear :

"Dry and cold fighting for thee this day, my
spear,"

Quoth he. And so when one the golden
shield

Immortal, daedal, for no one else to wield,
Cast o'er his head, he frowned : "On thy
bright face

Let me see who shall dare a dint," he says,
And stood in thought full-armed ; thereafter
poured

Libation at the tent-door to the Lord
Of earth and sky, and prayed, saying : "O
Thou

That hauntest dark Dodona, hear me now,
Since that the shadowing arm of Time is
flung

Far over me, but cloudeth me full young.
Scatheless I vow them. Let one Trojan cast
His spear and loose my spirit. Rage is past
Though I go forth my most provocative
Adventure : 'tis not I that seek. Receive
My prayer Thou as I have earned it—lo,
Dying I stand, and hail Thee as I go
Lord of the Ægis, wonderful, most great ! ”

Which done, he took his stand, and bid
his mate

Urge on the steeds ; and all the Achaian host
Followed him, not with outcry or loud boast
Of deeds to do or done, but silent, grim
As to a shambles—so they followed him,
Eyeing that nodding crest and swaying spear
Shake with the chariot. Solemn thus they
near

The Trojan walls, slow-moving, as by a Fate
Driven ; and thus before the Skaian Gate
Stands he in pomp of dreadful calm, to die,
As once in dreadful haste to slay.

Thereby

The walls were thick with men, and in the
towers

Women stood gazing, clustered close as
flowers

That blur the rocks in some high mountain
pass

With delicate hues ; but like the gray hill-
grass
Which the wind sweepeth, till in waves of
light
It tideth backwards—so all gray or white
Showed they, as sudden surges moved them
cloak
Their heads, or bare their faces. And none
spoke
Among them, for there stood not woman
there
But mourned her dead, or sensed not in the
air
Her pendent doom of death, or worse than
death.
Frail as flowers were their faces, and all breath
Came short and quick, as on this dreadful
show
Staring, they pondered it done far below
As on a stage where the thin players seem
Unkith to them who watch, the stuff of dream.
Nor else about the plain showed living thing
Save high in the blue where sailed on out-
spread wing
A vulture bird intent, with mighty span
Of pinion.

In the hush spake the dead man,
Hollow-voiced, terrible : “ Ye tribes of Troy,
Here stand I out for death, and ye for joy
Of killing as ye will, by cast of spear,
By bowshot or with sword. If any peer

Of Hector or Sarpedon care the bout
Which they both tried aforetime let him out
With speed, and bring his many against one,
Fearing no treachery, for there shall be none
To aid me, God nor man ; nor yet will I
Stir finger in the business, but will die
By murder sooner than in battle fall
Under some Trojan hand."

Breathless stood all,
Not moving out ; but Paris on the roof
Of his high house, where snug he sat aloof,
Drew taut the bowstring home, and notched
a shaft,
Soft whistling to himself, what time with craft
Of peering eyes and narrow twisted face
He sought an aim.

Swift from her hiding-place
Came burning Helen then, in her blue eyes
A fire unquenchable, but cold as ice
That scorcheth ere it strike a mortal chill
Upon the heart. "Darest thou . . . ?"

Smiling still,
He heeded not her warning, nor he read
The terror of her eyes, but drew and sped
A screaming arrow, deadly, swerving not—
Then stood to watch the ruin he had wrought.

He heard the sob of breath o'er all the host
Of hushing men ; he marked, but then he
lost,
The blood-spurt at the shaft-head ; for the
crest

Upheaved, the shoulders stiffen'd, ere to the
breast

Bent down the head, as though the glazing
sight

Curious would mark the death-spot. Still
upright

Stood he ; but as a tree that on the side

Of Ida yields to axe her soaring pride

And lightlier waves her leafy crown, and
swings

From side to side—so on his crest the wings

Erect seemed shaking upwards, and to sag

The spear's point, and the burden'd head to
wag

Before the stricken body felt the stroke,

Or the strong knees grew lax, or the heart
broke.

Breathless they waited ; then the failing
man

Stiffened anew his neck, and changed and wan

Looked for the last time in the face of day,

And seemed to dare the Gods such might to
slay

As this, the sanguine splendid thing he was,

Withal now gray of face and pinched. Alas,

For pride of life ! Now he had heard his
knell.

His spirit passed, and crashing down he fell,

Mighty Achilles, and struck the earth, and
lay

A huddled mass, a bulk of bronze and clay

Bestuck with guilt and glitter, like a toy.
There dropt a forest hush on watching Troy,
Upon the plain and watching ranks of men ;
And from a tower some woman keened him
then
With long thin cry that wavered in the air—
As once before one wailed her Hector there.

SECOND STAVE

MENELAUS' DREAM : HELEN ON THE WALL

So he who wore his honour like a wreath
About his brows went the dark way of death ;
Which being done, that deed of ruth and
doom
Gave breath to Troy ; but on the Achaians
gloom
Settled like pall of cloud upon a land
That swoons beneath it. Desperate they
scanned
Each other, saying : " Now we are left by
God,"
And in the huts behind the wall abode,
Heeding not Diomedes, Idomeneus,
Nor keen Odysseus, nor that friend of Zeus
Mykenai's king, nor that robbed Menelaus,
Nor bowman Teukros, Nestor wise, nor
Aias—
Huge Aias, cursed in death ! Peleides bare
Himself with pride, but he went raving there.
For in the high assembly Thetis made

In honour of her son, to waft his shade
In peace to Hades' house, after the fire
Twice a man's height for him who did suspire
Twice a man's heart and render it to Heaven
Who gave it, after offerings paid and given,
And games of men and horses, she brought
forth

His regal arms for hero of most worth
In the broad Danaan host, who was adjudged
Odysseus by all voices. Aias grudged
The vote and wandered brooding, drawn
apart

From his room-fellows, seeding in his heart
Envy, which biting inwards did corrode
His mettle, and his ill blood plied the goad
Upon his brain, until the wretch made mad
Went muttering his wrongs, ill-trimmed, ill-
clad,

Sightless and careless, with slack mouth awry,
And working tongue, and danger in the eye ;
And oft would stare at Heaven and laugh
his scorn :

"O fools, think not to trick me!" then
forlorn

Would gaze about green earth or out to sea :
"This is the end of man in his degree"—
Thus would he moralise in those bare lands
With hopeless brows and tossing up of
hands—

"To sow in sweat and see another reap!"
Then, pitying himself, he'd fall to weep

His desolation, scorned by Gods, by men
Slighted ; but in a flash he'd rage again
And shake his naked sword at unseen foes,
And dare them bring Odysseus to his blows :
Or let the man but flaunt himself in arms . . . !

So threatening God knows what of savage
harms,

On him the oxen patient in the marsh,
Knee-deep in rushes, gazed to hear his harsh
Outcry ; and them his madness taught for
Greeks,

So on their dumb immensity he wreaks
His vengeance, driving in the press with
shout

Of " Aias ! Aias ! " hurtling, carving out
A way with mighty swordstroke, cut and
thrust,

And makes a shambles in his witless lust ;
And in the midst, bloodshot, with blank wild
eyes

Stands frothing at the lips, and after lies
All reeking in his madman's battlefield,
And sleeps nightlong. But with the dawn's
revealed

The pity of his folly ; then he sees
Himself at his fool's work. With shaking
knees

He stands amid his slaughter, and his own
Adds to the wreck, plunging without a groan
Upon his planted sword. So Aisa died
Lonely ; and he who, never from his side

Removed, had shared his fame, the Lokrian,
Abode the fate foreordered in the plan
Which the Blind Women ignorantly weave.

But think not on the dead, who die and
leave

A memory more fragrant than their deeds,
But to the remnant rather and their needs
Give thought with me. What comfort in
their swords

Have they, robbed of the might of two such
lords

As Peleus' son and Telamon's? What art
Can drive the blood back to the stricken heart?
Like huddled sheep cowed obstinate, as dull
As oxen impotent the wain to pull
Out of a rut, which, failing at first lunge,
Answer not voice nor goad, but sideways
plunge

Or backward urge with lowered heads, or
stand

Dumb monuments of sufferance—so un-
manned

The Achaians brooded, nor their chiefs had
care

To drive them forth, since they too knew
despair,

And neither saw in battle nor retreat
A way of honour.

And the plain grew sweet
Again with living green; the spring o' the year

Came in with flush of flower and bird-call
clear ;
And Nature, for whom nothing wrought is
vain,
Out of shed blood caused grass to spring
again,
And seemed with tender irony to flout
Man's folly and pain when twixt dead spears
sprang out
The crocus-point and pied the plain with
fires
More gracious than his beacons ; and from
pyres
Of burnt dead men the asphodel uprose
Like fleecy clouds flushed with the morning
rose,
A holy pall to hide his folly and pain.
Thus upon earth hope fell like a new rain,
And by and by the pent folk within walls
Took heart and ploughed the glebe and from
the stalls
Led out their kine to pasture. Goats and
sheep
Cropt at their ease, and herd-boys now did
keep
Watch, where before stood armed sentinels ;
And battle-grounds were musical with bells
Of feeding beasts. Afar, high-beacht, the
ships
Loomed through the tender mist, their prows
—like lips

Of thirsty birds which, lacking water, cry
Salvation out of Heaven—flung on high :
Which marking, Ilios deemed her worst of
road
Was travelled, and held Paris for a God
Who winged the shaft that brought them all
this peace.

He in their love went sunning, took his
case

In house and hall, at council or at feast,
Careless of what was greatest or what least
Of all his deeds, so only by his side
She lay, the blush-rose Helen, stolen bride,
The lovely harbour of his arms. But she,
A thrall, now her own thralldom plain could
see,
And sick of dalliance, loathed herself, and
him
Who had beguiled her. Now through eyes
made dim
With tears she looked towards the salt sea-
beach
Where stood the ships, and sought for sign
in each
If it might be her people's, and so hers,
Poor alien !—Argive now herself she avers
And proudly slave of Paris and no wife :
Minion she calls herself ; and when to strife
Of love he claims her, secret her heart surges
Back to her lord ; and when to kiss he urges,

And when to play he woos her with soft
words,

Secret her fond heart calleth, like a bird's,
Towards that honoured mate who honoured
her,

Making her wife indeed, not paramour,
Mother, and sharer of his hearth and all
His gear. Thus every night : and on the
wall

She watches every dawn for what dawn
brings.

And the strong spirit of her took new
wings

And left her lovely body in the arms
Of him who doted, conning o'er her charms,
And witless held a shell ; but forth as light
As the first sigh of dawn her spirit took
flight

Across the dusky plain to where fires
gleamed

And muffled guards stood sentry ; and it
streamed

Within the hut, and hovered like a wraith,
A presence felt, not seen, as when gray Death
Seems to the dying man a bedside guest,
But to the watchers cannot be exprest.

So hovered Helen in a dream, and yearned
Over the sleeper as he moaned and turned,
Renewing his day's torment in his sleep ;
Who presently starts up and sighing deep,
Searches the entry, if haply in the skies

The day begin to stir. Lo there, her eyes
Like waning stars! Lo there, her pale sad
face
Becurtained in loose hair! Now he can
trace
Athwart that gleaming moon her mouth's
droopt bow
To tell all truth about her, and her woe
And dreadful store of knowledge. As one
shockt
To worse than death lookt she, with horror
lockt
Behind her tremulous tragic-moving lips :
"O love, O love," saith he, and saying, slips
Out of the bed : "Who hath dared do thee
wrong?"
No answer hath she, but she looks him long
And deep, and looking, fades. He sleeps
no more,
But up and down he pads the beaten floor,
And all that day his heart's wild crying
hears,
And can thank God for gracious dew of
tears
And tender thoughts of her, not thoughts of
shame.
So came the next night, and with night she
came,
Dream-Helen ; and he knew then he must go
Whence she had come. His need would
have it so—

And her need. Never must she call in vain.

Now takes he way alone over the plain
Where dark yet hovers like a catafalque
And all life swoons, and only dead things
walk,

Uneasy sprites denied a resting space,
That shudder as they flit from place to place,
Like bats of flaggy wing that make night
blink

With endless quest : so do those dead, men
think,

Who fall and are unserved by funeral rite.
These passes he, and nears the walls of might
Which Godhead built for proud Laomedon,
And knows the house of Paris built thereon,
Terraced and set with gadding vines and trees
And ever falling water, for the ease
Of that sweet indweller he held in store.
Thither he turns him quaking, but before
Him dares not look, lest he should see her
there

Aglimmer through the dusk and, unaware,
Discover her fill some mere homely part
Intolerably familiar to his heart,
And deeply there enshrined and glorified,
Laid up with bygone bliss. Yet on he hied,
Being called, and ever closer on he came
As if no wrong nor misery nor shame
Could harder be than not to see her—Nay,
Even if within that smooth thief's arms she
lay

Besmothered in his kisses—rather so
Had he stood stabbed to see, than on to
go

His round of lonely exile !

Now he stands
Beneath her house, and on his spear his
hands

Rest, and upon his hands he grounds his
chin,

And motionless abides till day come in ;
Pure of his vice, that he might ease her woe,
Not brand her with his own. Not yet the
glow

Of false dawn throbbed, nor yet the silent
town

Stood washt in light, clear-printed to the
crown

In the cold upper air. Dark loomed the
walls,

Ghostly the trees, and still shuddered the
calls

Of owl to owl from unseen towers. Afar
A dog barked. High and hidden in the
haar

Which blew in from the sea a heron cried
Honk ! and he heard his wings, but not
espied

The heavy flight. Slow, slow the orb was
filled

With light, and with the light his heart was
thrilled

With opening music, faint, expectant, sharp
As the first chords one picks out from the
harp

To prelude paean. Venturing all, he lift
His eyes, and there encurtained in a drift
Of sea-blue mantle close-drawn, he espies
Helen above him watching, her grave eyes
Upon him fixt, blue homes of mystery
Unfathomable, eternal as the sea,
And as unresting.

So in that still place,
In that still hour stood those two face to
face.

THIRD STAVE

MENELAUS SPEAKS WITH HELEN

BUT when he had her there, sharp root
of ill

To him and his, safeguarded from him still,
Too sweet to be forgotten, too much marred
By usage to be what she seemed, bescarred,
Behandled, too much lost and too much won,
Mock image making horrible the sun
That once had shown her pure for his
demesne,

And still revealed her lovely, and unclean—
Despair turned into stone what had been kind,
And bitter surged his griefs, to flood his
mind.

“O ruinous face,” said he, “O evilhead,
Art thou so early from the wicked bed?
So prompt to slough the snugness of thy
vice?

Or is it that in luxury thou art nice
Become, and dalliest?” Low her head she
hung

She blushed and dared to peer
Downward. "Is it so wonderful," she said,
"If I desire it?" He: "Nay, by my head,
Not so; but wonderful I think it is
In any man to suffer it." The hiss
Of passion stript all vesture from his tones
And showed the King man naked to the
bones,
Man naked to the body's utterance.

She turned her head, but felt his burning
glance
Scorch, and his words leap up. "Dost thou
desire
I leave thee then? Answer me that."

"Nay, sire,
Not so." And he: "Bid me to stay while
sleeps
Thy house," he said, "so stay I." Her eyes'
deeps
Flooded his soul and drowned him in despair,
Despair and rage. "Behold now, ten years'
wear
Between us and our love! Now if I cast
My spear and rove the snow-mound of thy
breast,
Were that a marvel?"

Long she lookt and grave,
Pondering his face and searching. "Not so
brave
My lord as that would prove him. Nay,
and I know

He would not do it." And the truth was
so ;

And well he knew the reason : better she.

Yet for a little in that vacancy
Of silence and unshadowing light they stood,
Those long-divided, speechless. His first
mood

With bitter grudge was choked, but hers was
mild,

As fearing his. At last she named the child,
Asking, Was all well? Short he told her,
Yes,

The child was well. She fingered in her dress
And watched her hand at play there.

"Here," she said,
"There is no child," and sighed. Into his
dead

And wasted heart there leaped a flame and
caught

His hollow eyes. "Rememberest thou
naught,

Nothing regrettest, nothing holdst in grief
Of all our joy together ere that thief
Came rifling in?" For all her answer she

Lookt long upon him, long and earnestly ;
And misty grew her eyes, and slowly filled.
Slowly the great tears brimmed, and slowly
rilled

Adown her cheeks. So presently she hid
Those wells of grief, and hung her lovely
head ;

And he had no more words, but only a cry
At heart too deep for utterance, and too high
For tears.

And now came Paris from the house
Into the sun, rosy and amorous,
As when the sun himself from the sea-rim
Lifteth, and gloweth on the earth grown dim
With waiting ; and he piped a low clear call
As mellow as the thrush's at the fall
Of day from some near thicket. At whose
sound

Rose up caught Helen and blushing turned
her round

To face him ; but in going, ere she met
The prince, her hand along the parapet
She trailed, palm out, for sign to who below
Rent at himself, nor had the wit to know
In that dumb signal eloquence, and hope
Therein beyond his sick heart's utmost scope.
Throbbing he stood as when a quick-blown
peat,

Now white, now red, burns inly—O wild
heat,

O ravenous race of men, who'd barter Space
And Time for one short snatch of instant
grace !

Withal, next day, drawn by his dear
desire,

When as the young green burned like
emerald fire

In the cold light, back to the tryst he came ;
But she was sooner there, and called his
name

Softly as cooing dove her bosom's mate ;
And showed her eyes to him, which half
sedate

To be so sought revealed her, half in doubt
Lest he should deem her bold to meet the
bout

With too much readiness. But high he
flaunted

Her name towards the sky. "Thou God-
enchanted,

Thou miracle of dawn, thou Heart of the
Rose,

Hail thou ! " On his own eloquence he grows
The lover he proclaims. "O love," he
saith,

"I would not leave thee for a moment's
breath,

Nor once these ten long years had left thy
side

Had it been possible to stay ! "

She sighed,
She wondered o'er his face, she looked her
fill,

Museful, still doubting, smiling half, athrill,
All virgin to his praise. "O wonderful,"
She said, "Such store of love for one so foul
As I am now ! "

O fatal hot-and-cold,

O love, whose iris wings not long can hold
The upper air ! Sudden her thought smote
hot

On him. "Thou sayest ! True it is, God
wot !

Warm from his bed, and tears for thy
unworth ;

Warm from his bed, and tears to meet my
mirth ;

Then back to his bed ere yet thy tears be
dry !"

She heard not, but she knew his agony
Of burning vision, and kept back her tears
Until his pity moved in tune with hers
Towards herself. But he from thunderous
brows

Frowned on. "No more I see thee by this
house,

Except to slay thee when the hour decree
An end to this vile nest of cuckoldry
And holy vows made hateful, save thou speak
To each my question sooth. Keep dry thy
cheek

From tears, hide up thy beauty with thy
grief—

Or let him have his joy of them, thy thief,
What time he may. Answer me thou, or
vain

Till thine hour strike to look for me again."
With hanging head and quiet hanging
hands,

With lip atremble, as caught in fault she
stands,
Scarce might he hear her whispered message :
" Ask,
Lord, and I answer thee."

Strung to his task :
" Tell me now all," he said, " from that far
day

Whenas embracing thee, I stood to pray,
And poured forth wine unto the thirsty earth
To Zeus and to Poseidon, in whose girth
Lie sea and land ; to Gaia next, their spouse,
And next to Heré, mistress of my house,
Traitor, and thine, for grace upon my
faring :

For thou wert by to hear me, false arm
bearing

Upon my shoulder, glowing, lying cheek
Next unto mine. Ay, and thou prayedst,
with meek

Fair seeming, prosperous send-off and return.
Tell me what then, tell all, and let me learn
With what pretence that dog-souled slaked
his thirst

In thy sweet liquor. Tell me that the
first."

Then Helen lifted up her head, and
beamed
Clear light upon him from her eyes, which
seemed
That blue which, lying on the white sea-bed

And gazing up, the sunbeam overhead
Would show, with green entinctured, and the
warp

Inwoven of golden shafts, blended yet sharp ;
So that a glory mild and radiant
Transfigured them. Upon him fell aslant
That lovely light, while in her cheeks the hue
Of throbbing dawn came sudden. So he
knew

Her best before she spoke ; for when she
spoke

It was as if the nightingale should croak
In April midst the first young leaves, so
bleak,

So harsh she schooled her throat, that it
should speak

Dry matter and hard logic—as if she
Were careful lest self-pity urged a plea
Which was not hers to make ; or as one faint
And desperate lays down all his argument
Like bricks upon a field, let who will make
A house of them ; so drily Helen spake
With a flat voice. “Thou hadst been nine
days gone,

Came my lord Alexandros, Priam’s son,
And hailed me in the hall whereas I sat,
And claimed his guest-right, which not
wondering at

I gave as fitting was. Then came the day
I was beguiled. What more is there to say ? ”

Fixt on her fingers playing on the wall

Her eyes were. But the King said : " Tell
me all.

Thou wert beguiled : by his desire beguiled,
Or by thine own ? " She shook her head and
smiled

Most sadly, pitying herself. " Who knoweth
The ways of Love, whence cometh, whither
goeth

The heart's low whimper ? This I know,
he loved

Me then, and pleased only where I moved
About the house. And I had pleasure too
To know of me he had it. Then we knew
The day at hand when he must take the
road

And leave me ; and its eve we close abode
Within the house, and spake not. But I
wept."

She stayed, and whispering down her next
word crept :

" I was beguiled, beguiled." And then her
lip

She bit, and rueful showed her partnership
In sinful dealing.

But he, in his esteem
Bleeding and raw, urged on. " To Kranai's
deme

He took thee then ? "

Speechless she bent her head
Towards her tender breasts whereon, soft
shed

As upon low quiet hills, the dawn light
played,
And limned their gentle curves or sank in
shade.

So gazing, stood she silent, but the King
Urged on. "From thence to Ilios, thou
willing,
He took thee?"

Then, "I was beguiled," again
She said; and he, who felt a worthier strain
Stir in his gall compassion, and uplift
Him out of knowledge, saw a blessed rift
Upon his dark horizon, as tow'rd's night
The low clouds break and shafted shows the
light.

"Ten years beguiled!" he said, "but now it
seems

Thou art——" She shook her head. "Nay,
now come dreams;

Nay, now I think, remember, now I see."

"What callest thou to mind?" "Her-
mione,"

She said, "our child, and Sparta my own
land,

And all the honour that lay to my hand
Had I but chosen it, as now I would"—
And sudden hid her face up in her hood,
Her courage ebb'd in grief, all hardness
drowned

In bitter weeping.

Noble pity crowned

The greater man in him ; so for a space
They wept together, she for loss ; for grace
Of gain wept he. "No more," he said, "my
sweet,
Tell me no more."

"Ah, hear the whole of it
Before my hour is gone," she cried. But he
Groaning, "I dare not stay here lest I see
Him take thee again."

Both hands to fold her breast,
She shook her head ; like as the sun through
mist
Shone triumph in her eyes. "Have no more
fear

Of him or any——" Then, hearing a stir
Within the house, her finger toucht her lip,
And one fixt look she gave of fellowship
Assured—then turned and quickly went her
way ;
And his light vanisht with her for that day

FOURTH STAVE

THE APOLOGY OF HELEN

O SINGING heart, O twice-undaunted lover!
O ever to be blest, twice blest moreover!
Twice over win the world in one girl's eyes,
Twice over lift her name up to the skies;
Twice to hope all things, so to be twice
born—

For he lives not who cannot front the morn
Saying, "This day I live as never yet
Lived striving man on earth!" What if the
fret

Of loss and ten years' agonizing snow
Thy hairs or leave their tracery on thy brow,
Each line beslotted by the demon hounds
Hunting thee down o' nights? Laugh at
thy wounds,

Laugh at thy eld, strong lover, whose blood
flows

Clear from the fountain, singing as it goes,
"She loves, and so I live and shall not die!
Love on, love her: 'tis immortality.

Once more before the sun he greeted her :
She glowed her joy ; her mood was calm and
clear

As mellow evening's whenas, like a priest,
Rain has absolved the world, and golden mist
Hangs over all like benediction.

In her proud eyes sat triumph on a throne,
To know herself beloved, her lover by,
So near the consummation. Womanly
She dallied with the moment when, all wife,
Upon his breast she'd lie and cast her life,
Cast body, soul and spirit in one gest
Supreme of giving. Glorifying in his quest
Of her, now let her hide what he must glean,
But not know yet. Ah, sweet to feel his
keen

Long eye-search, like the touch of eager
fingers,

And sweet to thrill beneath such hot blush-
bringers ;

To fence with such a swordsman hazardous
And sweet. " Belov'd, thou art glad of me ! "

Then thus

Antiphonal to him she breathes, " Thou
sayest ! "

" I see thy light and hail it ! "

" Thou begayest

My poor light. "

" Knowest thou not that thou art loved ? "

" And am I loved then ? "

" If thou'ldst have it proved,

Look in my eyes. Would thine were open
book !”

“Palimpsest I,” she said, and would not
look.

But he was grappling now with truth,
would have it,

What though it cost him all his gain. She
gave it,

Looking him along. “O lady mine,” he said,
“Now are my clouds disperséd every shred ;
For thou art mine ; I think thou lovest me.
Speak, is that true ?”

She could not, or may be
She would not hold her gaze, but let it fall,
And watched her fingers idling on the wall,
And so remained ; but urged to it by the
spell

He cast, she whispered down, “I cannot tell
Thee here, and thus apart”—which when he
had

In its full import drove him well-nigh mad
With longing. “Call me and I come !”

But fear
Flamed in her eyes : “No, no, ’tis death !
He’s here

At hand. ’Tis death for thee, and worse
than death—”

She ended so—“for both of us.”

And breath
Failed him, for well he knew now what she
meant,

And sighed his thanks to Gods beneficent.

Thereafter in sweet use of lovers' talk,
In boon spring weather, whenas lovers walk
Handfasted through the meadows pied, and
wet

With dew from flower and leaf, these lovers
met—

Two bodies separate, one wild heart between,
Day after day, these two long-severed been ;
And of this mating of the eye and tongue
There grew desire passionate and strong
For body's mating and its testimony,
Hearts' intimacy, perfect, full and free.

And Helen for her heart's ease did deny
Her girdled Goddess of the beamy eye,
Saying, "Come you down, Mistress of sleek
loves

And panting nights : your service of bought
doves

And honey-hearted wine may cost too dear.
What hast thou done for me since first my
ear

With thy sly music thou didst sign and seal
Apprentice to thy mystery, teach me feel
Thy fierce divinity in the trembling touch
Of open lips? Served I not thee too much
In Kranai and in Sparta my demesne,
Too much in wide-wayed Ilios, Eastern
Queen?

Yes, but it was too much a thousandfold,
For what was I but leman bought and sold?

“For woman craved what mercy hath man
brought,
What face a woman for a woman sought?
What mercy or what face? And what saith
she,
The hunted, scornéd wretch? Boast that
she be
Coveted, hankered, spat on? One to gloat,
The rest to snarl without! If man play goat,
What must she play? Her glory is it to
draw
On greedy eye, sting greedy lip and paw,
And find the crown of her desire therein?
Hath she no rarer bliss than all this sin,
Is she for dandling, kissing, hidden up
For hungry hands to stroke or lips to sup?
Hath she then nothing of her own, no mirth
In honesty, nor eyes to worship worth,
Nor pride except in that which makes men
dogs,
Nor loathing for the vice wherein, like logs
That float beneath the sun, lie fair women
Submiss, inert receptacles for sin?
Is this her all? Hath she no heart, nor care
Therefor? No womb, nor hope therein to
bear
Fruit of her heart's insurgence? Is her face,
Are these her breasts for fondling, not to
grace
Her heart's high honour, swell to nurture it,
That it too grow? Hath she no mother-wit,

Nor sense for living things and innocent,
Nor leap of joy for this good world's content
Of sun and wind, of flower and leaf, and song
Of bird, or shout of children as they throng
The world of mated men and women? Nay,
Persuade me not, O Kypris; but I say
Evil hath been the lore which thou hast
taught—

For many have loved my face, and many
sought

My breast, and thought it joy supping thereat
Sweetness and dear delight; but out of that
What hath there come to them, to me and all
Mine but hot shame? Not milk, but bitter
gall."

So in her high passion she rent herself
And rocked, or hid her face upon the shelf
Of the grim wall, lest he should see the whole
Inexpiable sorrow of her soul.

But he by pity pure made bountiful
Lent her excuse, by every means to lull
Her agony. Said he, "Of mortals who
Can e'er withstand the way she wills them to,
Kypris the forceful Goddess? Nay, dear child,
Thou wert constrained."

She said, "I was beguiled
And clung to him until the day-dawn broke
When I could read as in the roll of a book
His open heart. And then my own heart
reeled

To know him craven, dog, not man, revealed
A panting drudge of lust, who held me here
Caged vessel. Nay, come close. I loved
him dear,

Too dear, I know ; but never till he came
Had known the leap of joy, the fire of flame
Upon the heart he gave me, Paris the bright,
Whose memory was music and his sight
Fragrance, whose nearness made my footfall
dance,

Whose touch was fever, and his burning
glance

Faintness and blindness ; in whose light my
life

Centred ; who was the sun, and I, false wife,
The foolish flower that turns whereso he
wheels

Over the broad earth's canopy, and steals
Colour from his strong beam, but at the last
Whenas the night comes and the day is past
Droops, burnt at the heart. So loved I him,
and so

Waxed bold to dare the deed that brought
this woe."

And there she changed, and bitter was her
cry :

" Ah, lord, far better had it been to die
Ere I had cast this pain on thee, and shame
On me, and wrought such outrage on our
name.

Natheless I live——"

“ Ay, and give life ! ” he said ;
“ Yet this thing more I’d have thee tell—
what led

Thy thought to me ? From him, what
turned thy troth—

Such troth as there could be ? ”

She cried, “ The oath !
The oath ye sware before the Lords of
Heaven,

The sacrifice, the pledges taken and given
When thou and Paris met upon the plain,
And all the host sat down to watch you twain
Do battle, which should have me. For my
part,

They took me forth to watch ; as in the mart
A heifer feels the giver of the feast
Pinch in her flank, and hears the chaffer twist
This way and that for so much fat or lean—
Even so was I, a queen, child of a queen.”

She bit her lip until the blood ran free,
And in her eyes he markt deep injury
Scald as the salt tears welled ; but “ Listen
yet,”

She said : “ Ye fought, and Paris fell beset
Under thy spurning heel, yet felt no whit
The bitterness as I must come to it ;
For she, his Goddess, hid him up in mists
And brought him beat and broken from the
lists

Here to his chamber. But I stood and
burned,

Shameful to be by one lost, by one earned,
A prize for games, a slave, a bandied thing—
Since as the oath was made so must I swing
From bed to bed. But while I stood and

wept,

Melted in fruitless sorrow, up she crept
For me, his Goddess, gliding like a snake,
Who wreathed her arms and whispering me
go make

The nuptial couch, 'What oath binds love?'
did say.

Loathing him, I must go. He had his way,
As well he might who paid that goodly price,
Honour, truth, courage, all, to have his vice :
The which forsook him when those fair
things fled ;

For though my body hath lain in his bed,
My heart abhors it. And now in truth I wis
My lord's true heart is where my own heart
is,

The two together welded and made whole ;
And I will go to him and give my soul
And shamed and faded body to his nod,
To spurn or take ; and he shall be my God."

Whereat made virgin, as all women are
By love's white purging fire which leaves no
scar

Where all was soiled and seamed before the
torch

Of Eros toucht the heart, and the keen
scorch

Lickt up the foul misuse of vase so fair
As woman's body, Helen flusht and fair
Leaned from the wall a fire-hued seraph's
face

And in one rapt long look gave and took
Grace.

Deep in her eyes he saw the light divine,
Quick in him ran fierce joy of it like wine :
Light unto light made answer, as a flag
Answers when men tell tidings from one crag
Unto another, and from peak to peak
The good news flashes. Scarcely could he
speak

Measurable words, so high his wild thought
whirled :

“Bride, Goddess, Helen, O Wonder of the
World,
Shall I come for thee?”

Her tender words came soft
As dropping rose petals on garden croft
Down from the wall's sheer height—“Come
soon, come soon.”

And homing to the lines those drummed his
tune.

FIFTH STAVE

A COUNCIL OF THE ACHAIANS : THE EMBASSY OF ODYSSEUS

Now calleth he assembly of the chiefs,
Princes and kings and captains, them whose
griefs

To ease his own like treasure had been lent ;
Who came and sat at board within the tent
Of him they hailed host-father and their lord
For this adventure, in aught else abhorred
Of all true men. He sits above the rest,
The fox-red Agamemnon, round his crest
The circlet of his kingship over kings,
And at his thigh the sword gold-hilted swings
Which Zeus gave Atreus once ; and in his
heart

That gnawing doubt which twice had checkt
his start

For high emprise, having twice egged him to it,
As stout Odysseus knew who had to rue it.

Beside him Nestor sat, Nestor the old,
White as the winter moon, with logic cold

Instilled, as if the blood in him had fled
And in his veins clear spirit ran instead,
Which made men reasons and not fired their
sprites.

And next Idomeneus of countless fights,
Shrewd leader of the Cretans ; by his side
Keen-flashing Diomedes in his pride,
The young, the wild in onset, whose war-
shrill,

Next after Peleus' son's, held all Troy still,
And stayed the gray crows at their ravelling
Of dead men's bones. Into debate full fling
Went he, adone with tapping of the foot
And drumming on the board. Had but his
suit

Been granted—so he said—the war were done
And Troy a name ere full three years had
gone :

For as for Helen and her daintiness,
Troy held a mort of women who no less
Than she could pleasure night when work
was over

And men came home ready to play the lover ;
And in housework would better her. Let
Helen

Be laid by Paris, villain, and dead villain—
Dead long ago if he had taken the field
Instead of Menelaus. Then no shield
Had Kypris' golden body been, acquist
With his sword-arm already, near the wrist !

So Diomedes. Next him sat a man

With all his woe to come, the Lokrian
Aias, son of Oïleus, bearded swart,
Pale, with his little eyes, and legs too short
And arms too long, a giant when he sat,
Dwarf else, and in the fight a tiger-cat.
But mark his neighbour, mark him well : to
him

Falleth the lot to lay a charge more grim
On woman fair than even Althaia felt
Like lead upon her heartstrings, when she
knelt

And blew to flame the brand that held the
life

Of her own son ; or Procne with the knife,
Who slew and dressed her child to be a meal
To his own father. But this man's thews
were steel,

And steely were the nerves about his heart,
As they had need. Mark him, and mark
the part

He plays hereafter. Odysseus is his name,
The wily Ithacan, deathless in his fame
And in his substance deathless, since he
goes

Immortal forth and back wherever blows
The thunder of thy rhythm, O blind King,
First of the tribe of them with songs to sing,
Fountain of storied music and its end—
For who the poet since who doth not tend
To essay thy leaping measure, or call down
Thy nodded approbation for his crown

And all his wages ?

Other chiefs sat there
In order due : as Pyrrhos, very fair
And young, with high bright colour, and the
hue

Of evening in his eyes of violet-blue—
Son of Achilles he, and new to war.
Then Antiklos and Teukros, best by far
Of all the bowmen in the host. And last
Menestheus the Athenian dikast,
Who led the folk from Pallas's fair home.

To them spake Menelaus, being come
Into assembly last, and taken in hand
The spokesman's staff : " Ye princes of our
land,

Adventurous Achaians, stout of heart,
Good news I bring, that now we may depart
Each to his home and kindred, each to his
hearth

And wife and children dear and well-tilled
garth,

Contented with the honour he has brought
To me and mine, since I have what we've
sought

With bitter pain and loss. Yea, even now
Hath Heré crowned your strife and earned
my vow

Made these ten years come harvest, having
drawn

The veil from off those eyes than which not
dawn

Holds sweeter light nor holier, once they see.
Yea, chieftains, Helen's heart comes back to
me ;

And fast she watches now hard by the wall
Of the wicked house, and ere the cock shall
call

Another morn I have her in my arms
Redeemed for Sparta, pure of Trojan harms,
Whole-hearted and clean-hearted as she came
First, before Paris and his deed of shame
Threatened my house with wreck, and on his
own

Have brought no joy. This night, disguised,
alone,

I stand within the city, waiting day ;
Then when men sleep, all in the shadowless
gray,

Robbing the robber, I drop down with her
Over the wall—and lo ! the end of the war ! ”

Thus great of heart and high of heart he
spake,

And trembling ceased. Awhile none cared
to break

The silence, like unto that breathless hush
That holds a forest ere the great winds rush
Up from the sea-gulf, bringing furious rain
Like mist to drown all nature, blot the plain
In one great sheet of water without form.
So held the chiefs. Then Diomede brake in
storm.

Ever the first he was to fling his spear

Into the press of battle ; dread his cheer,
Like the long howling of a wolf at eve
Or clamour of the sea-birds when they grieve
And hanker the out-scouring of the net
Hidden behind the darkness and the wet
Of tempest-ridden nights. "Princes," he
cried,

"What say ye to this wooer of his bride,
For whom it seems ten nations and their best
Have fought ten years to bring her back to
nest ?

Is this your meed of honour ? Was it for
this

You flung forth fortune—to ensure him his ?
And he made snug at home, we seek our
lands

Barer than we left them, with emptier hands,
And some with fewer members, shed that he
Might fare as soft and trim as formerly !
Not so went I adventuring, good friend ;
Not so look I this business to have end :
Nay, but I fight to live, not live to fight,
And so will live by day as thou by night,
Sating my eyes with havoc on this race
Of robbers of the hearth ; see their strong
place

Brought level with the herbage and the weed,
That where they revelled once shrew-mice
may feed,

And moles make palaces, and bats keep
house.

And if thou art of spleen so slow to rouse
As quit thy score by thieving from a thief
And leave him scatheless else, thou art no
chief

For Tydeus' son, who sees no end of strife
But in his own or in his foeman's life."

So he. Then Pyrrhos spake: "By that
great shade

Wherein I stand, which thy false Paris made
Who slew my father, think not so to have
done

With Troy and Priam; for Peleides' son
Must slake the sword that cries, and still the
ghost

Of him that haunts the ingles of this coast,
Murdered and unacquit while that man's
father

Liveth."

Then leapt up two, and both together
Cried, "Give us Troy to sack, give us our
fill

Of gold and bronze; give us to burn and
kill!"

And Aias said, "Are there no women then
In Troy, but only her? And are we men
Or virgins of Athené?" And the dream
Of her who served that dauntless One made
gleam

His shifting eyes, and stretcht his fleshy lips
Behind his beard.

Then stood that prince of ships

And shipmen, great Odysseus ; with one hand
He held the staff, with one he took command ;
And thus in measured tones, with word intent
Upon the deed, fierce but not vehement,
Drave in his dreadful message. At his sight
Clamour died down, even as the wind at night
Falls and is husht at rising of the moon.

“ Ye chieftains of Achaia, not so soon
Is strife of ten years rounded to a close,
Neither so are men seated, friends or foes.
For say thus lightly we renounced the meed
Of our long travail, gave so little heed
To our great dead as find in one man’s joy
Full recompense for all we’ve sunk in Troy—
Wives desolate, children fatherless, lands,
gear,

Stock without master, wasting year by year ;
Youth past, age creeping on, friends, brothers,
sons

Lost in the void, gone where no respite runs
For sorrow, but the darkness covers all—
What name should we bequeath our sons but
thrall,

Or what beside a name, who let go by
Ilios the rich for others’ usury ?
And have the blessed Gods no say in this ?
Think you they be won over by a kiss—
Heré the Queen, she, the unwearied aid
Of all our striving, Pallas the war-maid ?
Have they not vowed, and will ye scant their
hate,

Havoc on Ilios from gate to gate,
And for her towers abasement to the dust ?
Behold, O King, lust shall be paid with lust,
And treachery with treachery, and for blood
Blood shall be shed. Therefore let loose the
flood

Of our pent passion ; break her gates in, raze
The walls of her, cumber her pleasant ways
With dead men ; set on havoc, sate with spoil
Men ravening ; get corn and wine and oil,
Women to clasp in love, gold, silken things,
Harness of flashing bronze, swords, meed or
kings,

Chariots and horses swifter than the wind
Which, coursing Ida, leaves ruin behind
Of snapt tall trees : not faster shall they fall
Than Trojan spears once we are on the wall.
So only shall ye close this agelong strife,
Nor by redemption of a too fair wife,
Now smiling, now averse, now hot, now cold,
O Menelaus, may the tale be told !
Nay, but by slaying of Achilles' slayer,
By the betrayal of the bed-betrayer,
By not withholding from the spoils of war
Men freeborn, nor from them that beaten are
Their rueful wages. Ilios must fall."

He said, and sat, and heard the acclaim of
all,

Save of the sons of Atreus, who sat glum,
One flusht, one white as parchment, and both
dumb ;

One raging to be contraried, one torn
By those two passions wherewith he was
born,

The lust for body's ease and lust of gain.

Then slow he rose, Mykenai's king of men,
Gentle his voice to hear. "Laertes' son,"
He said, but 'twas Nestor he looked upon,
The wise old man who sat beside his chair,
Mild now who once, a lion, kept his lair
Untoucht of any, or if e'er he left it,
Left it for prey, and held that when he reft it
From foe, or over friend made stronger
claim :

"Laertes' son," the king said, "all men's
fame

Reports thee just and fertile in device ;
And as the friend of God great is thy price
To us of Argos ; for without the Gods
How should we look to trace the limitless
roads

That weave a criss-cross 'twixt us and our
home ?

Go to now, some will stay and other some
Take to the sea-ways, hasty to depart,
Not warfaring as men fare to the mart,
To best a neighbour in some chaffering bout ;
But honour is the prize wherefor they go out,
And having that, dishonoured are content
To leave the foe—that is best punishment.
Natheless since men there be, Argives of
worth,

Who needs must shed more blood ere they
go forth—

As if of blood enough had not been spilt!—
Devise thou with my brother if thou wilt,
Noble Odysseus, seeking how compose
His honour with thy judgment. Well he
knows

Thy singleness of heart, deep ponderer,
Lover of a fair wife, and sure of her.
Come, let this be the sum of our debate.”

“Content you,” Menelaus said, “I wait
Upon thy word, thou fosterling of Zeus.”

Then said Odysseus, “Be it as you choose,
Ye sons of Atreus. Then, advised, I say
Let me win into Troy as best I may,
Seek out the lovely lady of our land
And learn of her the watchwords, see how
stand

The sentries, how the warders of the gates;
The strength, how much it is; what prize
awaits

To crown our long endeavour. These things
learned,

Back to the ships I come ere yet are burned
The watch-fires of the night, before the sun
Hath urged his steeds the course they are to
run

Out of the golden gateways of the East.”

Which all agreed, and Helen’s lord not
least.

SIXTH STAVE

HELEN AND PARIS ; ODYSSEUS AND HELEN

LIKE as the sweet free air, when maids the
doors
And windows open wide, wanders the floors
And all the passage ways about the house,
Keen marshal of the sun, or serious
The cool gray light of morning 'gins to peer
Ere yet the household stirs, or chanticlere
Calls hinds to labour but hints not the glee
Nor full-flood glory of the day to be
When round about the hill the sun shall
swim
And burn a sea-path—so demure and slim
Went Helen on her business with swift feet
And light, yet recollected, and her sweet
Secret held hid, that she was loved where
need
Called her to mate, and that she loved
indeed—
Ah, sacred calm of wedlock, passion white
Of lovers knit in Heré's holy light !

But while in early morn she wonned alone
And Paris slept, shrill rose her singing tone,
And brave the light on kindled cheeks and
eyes :

Brave as her hope is, brave the flag she flies.

Then, as the hour drew on when the sun's
rim

Should burn a sheet of gold to herald him
On Ida's snowy crest, lithe as a pard
For some lord's pleasuring encaged and
barred

She paced the hall soft-footed up and down,
Lightly and feverishly with quick frown
Peered shrewdly this way, that way, like a
bird

That on the winter grass is aye deterred
His food-searching by hint of unknown
snare

In thicket, holt or bush, or lawn too bare ;
Anon stopped, lip to finger, while the tide
Beat from her heart against her shielded side—
Now closely girdled went she like a maid—
And then slipt to the window, where she
stayed

But minutes three or four ; for soon she past
Out to the terrace, there to be at last
Downgazing on her glory, which her king
Reflected up in every motioning
And flux of his high passion. Only here
She triumphed, nor cared she to ask how
near

The end of Troy, nor hazarded a guess
What deeds must do ere that could come to
pass.

To her the instant homage held all joy—
And what to her was Sparta, or what Troy
Beside the bliss of that?

Or Paris, what
Was he, who daily, nightly plained his lot
To have risked all the world and ten years
loved

This woman, now to find her nothing moved
By what he had done with her, what desired
To do? And more she chilled the less he
tired,

And more he ventured less she cared recall
What was to her of nothing worth, or all :
All if the King required it of her, nought
If he who now could take it. It was bought,
And his by bargain : let him have it then ;
But let it be for giving once again,
And all the rubies in the world's deep heart
Could fetch no price beside it.

Yet apart
She brooded on the man who held her
chained,
Minister to his pleasure, and disdained
Him more the more herself she must dis-
parage,

Reflecting on him all her hateful carriage,
So old, incredible, so flat, so stale,
No more to be recalled than old wife's tale ;

And scorned him, saw him neither high nor
low,

Not villain and not hero, who would go
Midway 'twixt baseness and nobility,
And not be fierce, if fierceness hurt a flea
Before his eyes. The man loved one thing
more

Than all the world, and made his mind a
whore

To minister his heart's need, for a price.

All which she loathed, yet chose not to be
nice

With the snug-revelling wretch, her master
yet,

Whose leaguer, though she scorned it, was no
fret ;

But lift on wings of her exalted mood,

She let him touch and finger what he would,

Unconscious of his being—as he saw,

And with a groan, whipt sharp upon the raw
Of his esteem, “ Ah, cruel art thou turned,”

Would cry, “ Ah, frosty fire, where I am
burned,

Yet dying bless the flame that is my bane ! ”

With which to clasp her closer was he fain,

To touch in love, and feast his eyes to see

Her quiver at his touch, and laugh to be

The plucker of such chords of such a rote ;

And laughing stoop and kiss her milky throat,

Then see her shut eyes hide what he had done.

“ Nay, shut them not upon me, nay, nor shun

My worship ! ” So he said ; but she, “ They
fade,

But are not yet so old as thou hast made
The soul thou pinnest here beneath my
breasts

Which you have loved too well.” His hand
he rests

Over one fair white bosom like a cup,
And leaning, of her lips his own must sup ;
But she will not, but gently doth refuse it,
Without a reason, save she doth not choose it.

Then when he flung away, she sat alone
And nursed her hope and sorrow, both in
one

Perturbéd bosom ; and her fingers wove
White webs as far afield her wits did rove
Perpending and perpending. So frail, so fair,
So faint she seemed, a wraith you had said
there,

A woman dead, and not in lovely flesh.
But all the while she writhed within the mesh
Of circumstance, and fiercely flamed her rage :
“ O slave, O minion, thing kept in a cage
For this sleek master’s handling ! ” So she
fumed

What time her wide eyes sought all ways, or
loomed

Like winter lakes dark in a field of snow,
And still ; nor lifted they their pall of woe
Responsive to her heart, nor flashed the
thrill

That knew, which said, "A true man loveth
me still."

That same night, as she used, fair Helen
went

Among the suppliants in the hall, and lent
To each who craved the bounty of her grace,
Her gentle touch on wounds, her pitiful face
To beaten eyes' dumb eloquence, that art
She above all could use, to stroke the heart
And plead compassion in bestowing it.
So with her handmaids busy did she flit
From man to man, 'mid outlaws, broken
blades,

Robbed husbandmen, their robbers, phantoms,
shades

Of what were men till hunger made them less
Than man can be and still know uprightness ;
And whom she spake with kindly words and
cheer

In him the light of hope began to peer
And glimmer in his eyes ; and him she fed
And nourisht, then sent homeward comforted
A little, to endure a little more.

Now among these, hard by the outer door,
She marked a man unbent whose sturdy look
Never left hers for long, whose shepherd's hook
Seemed not a staff to prop him, whose bright
eyes

Burned steadily, as fire when the wind dies.
Great in the girth was he, but not so tall

By a full hand as many whom the wall
Showed like gaunt channel-posts by an ebb
tide

Left stranded in a world of ooze. Beside
His knees she kneeled, and to his wounded
feet

Applied her balms ; but he, from his low
seat

Against the wall, leaned out and in her ear
Whispered, but so that no one else could
hear,

“Other than my wounds are there for thy
pains,

Lady, and deeper. One, a grievous, drains
The great heart of a king, and one is fresh,
Though ten years old, in the sweet innocent
flesh

Of a young child.”

Nothing said she, but stoopt
The closer to her task. He thought she
droopt

Her head, he knew she trembled, that her
shoulder

Twicht as she wrought her task ; so he grew
bolder,

Saying, “ But thou art pitiful ! I know
That thou wilt wash their wounds.”

She whispered “ Oh,
Be sure of me ! ”

Then he, “ Let us have speech
Secret together out of range or reach

Of prying ears, if such a chance may be."

Then she said, "Towards morning look
for me

Here, when the city sleeps, before the sun."

So till the glimmer of dawn this hardy one
Keepeth the watch in Paris' house. All
night

With hard unwinking eyes he sat upright,
While all about the sleepers lay, like stones
Littered upon a hill-top, save that moans,
Sighings and "Gods, have pity!" showed that
they

By night rehearsed the miseries of day,
And by bread lived not but by hope deferred.

Grimly he suffered till such time he heard
Helen's light foot and faint and gray in
the mist

Descried her slim veiled outline, saw her
twist

And slip between the sleepers on the ground,
Atiptoe coming, swift, with scarce a sound,
Not faltering in fear. No fear she had.

From head to foot a sea-blue mantle clad
Her lovely shape, from which her pale keen
face

Shone like the moon in frosty sky. No case
Was his to waver, for her eyes spake true
As Heaven upon the world. Him then she
drew

To follow her, out of the house, to where
The ilex trees stood darkly, and the air

Struck sharp and chill before the dawn's first
breath.

There stood a little altar underneath
An image : Artemis the quick deerslayer,
High-girdled and barekneed ; to Whom in
prayer

First bowed, then stood erect with lifted
hands,

Palms upward, Helen. " Lady of open lands
And lakes and windy heights," prayed she,
" so do

To me as to Amphion's wife when blew
The wind of thy high anger, and she stared
On sudden death that not one dear life spared
Of all she had—so do to me if false
I prove unto this Argive ! "

Then the walls
And gates of Ilios she traced in the sand,
And told him of the watch-towers, and how
manned

The gates at night ; and where the treasure
was,

And where the houses of the chiefs. But as
She faltered in the tale, " Show now," said he,
" Where Priam's golden palace is."

But she
Said, " Nay, not that ; for since the day of
shame

That brought me in, no word or look of
blame

Hath he cast on me. Nay, when Hector died

And all the city turned on me and cried
My name, as to an outcast dog men fling
Howling and scorn, not one word said the
King.

And when they hissed me in the shrines of
the Gods,

And women egged their children on with
nods

To foul the house-wall, or in passing spat
Towards it, he, the old King, came and sat
Daily with me, and often on my hair
Would lay a gentle hand. Him thou shalt
spare

For my sake who betray him."

Odysseus said,

"Well, thou shalt speak no more of him.
His bed

Is not of thy making, nor mine, but his
Who hath thee here a cageling, thy Paris.
Him he begat as well as Hector. Now
Let Priam look to reap what he did sow."

But when glad light brimmed o'er the cup
of earth

And shrill birds called forth men to grief or
mirth

As might afford their labour under the sun,
Helen advised how best to get him gone,
And fetched a roll of cord, the which made
fast

About a stanchion, about him next she cast,
About and about until the whole was round

His body, and the end to his arm she bound ;
Then showed him in the wall where best
 foothold

Might be, and watcht him down as fold by
 fold

He paid the cable out ; and as he paid
So did she twist it, till the coil was made
As it had been at first. Then watcht she him
Stride o'er the plain until he twinkled dim
And sank into the mist.

 That day came not
King Menelaus to the trysting spot ;
But ere Odysseus left her she had ta'en
A crocus flower which on her breast had lain,
And toucht it with her lips. " Give this,"
 said she,
" To my good lord who hath seen the flower
 in me."

SEVENTH STAVE

THEY BUILD THE HORSE AND ENTER IN

WHAT weariness of wind and wave and
foam

Was to be for Odysseus ere his home
Of scrub and crag and scanty pasturage
He saw again ! What stress of pilgrimage
Through roaring waterways and cities of
men,

What sojourn among folk beyond the ken
Of mortal seafarers in homelier seas,
More trodden lands ! Sure, none had earned
his ease

As he, that windless morning when he drew
Near silent Ithaca, gray in misty blue,
And wondered on the old familiar scene,
Which was to him as it had never been
Aforetime. Say, had he but had inkling
That in this hour all that long wandering
Of his was self-ensured, had he been bold
To plan and carry what must now be told
Of this too hardy champion ? Solve it you

Whose chronicling is over. Mine's to do.

All day until the setting of the sun,
Devising how to use what he had won
Odysseus stood ; for nothing within walls
Was hid, he knew the very trumpet-calls
Wherewith they turned the guard out, and
the cries

The sentries used to hearten or advise
The city in the watches of the night.
Once in, no hope for Ilios ; but his plight
No better stood for that, since no way in
Could he conceive, nor entry hope to win
For any force enough to seize the gate
And open for the host.

But then some Fate,
Or, some men say, Athené the gray-eyed,
Ever his friend, never far from his side,
Prompted him look about him. Then he
heeds

A stork set motionless in the dry reeds
That lift their withered arms, a skeleton host,
Long after winter and her aching frost
Are gone, and rattle in the spring's soft
breeze

Dry bones, as if to daunt the budding trees
And warn them of the summer's wrath to
come.

Still sat the bird, as fast asleep or numb
With cold, her head half-buried in her breast,
With close-shut eyes : a dead bird on the
nest,

Arrow-shot—for behold ! a wound she bore
Mid-breast, which stooping to, to see the
more,

Lo, forth from it came busy, one by one,
Light-moving ants ! So she to her death
had gone

These many days ; and there where she lost
life

Her carrion shell with it again was rife.
So teems the earth, that ere our clay be rotten
New hosts sweep clean the hearth, our deeds
forgotten.

But stooping still, Odysseus saw her not
Nor her brisk tenantry ; afar his thought,
And after it his vision, crossed the plain
And lit on Ilios, dim and lapt in rain,
Piled up like blocks which Titans rear to
mark

Where hero of their breed sits stiff and stark,
Spear in dead hand, and dead chin on dead
knees ;

And “ Ha,” cried he, “ proud hinderer of our
ease,

Now hold I thee within my hollowed hand ! ”

Straightway returning, Troy’s destruction
planned,

He sends for one Epeios, craftsman good,
And bids him frame him out a horse in wood,
Big-bellied as a ship of sixty oars
Such as men use for traffic, not in wars,
Nor piracy, but roomy, deep in the hold,

Where men may shelter if needs be from cold,
Or sleep between their watches. "Scant not
you,"

He said, "your timber not your sweat.
Drive through

This horse for me, Epeios, as if we
Awaited it to give the word for sea
And Hellas and our wives and children dear ;
For this is true, without it we stay here
Another ten-year shift, if by main force
We would take Troy, but ten days with my
horse."

So to their task Epeios and his teams
Went valiantly, and heaved and hauled great
beams

Of timber from far Ida, and hacked amain
And rought the framework out. Then to it
again

They went with adzes and their smoothing
tools,

And made all shapely ; next bored for their
dools

With augurs, and made good stock on to
stock

With mortise and with dovetail. Last, they
lock

The frames with clamps, the nether to the
upper,

And body forth a horse from crest to crupper
In outline.

Now their ribbing must be shaped

With axe to take the round, first rought,
then scraped
With adzes, then deep-mortised in the frame
To bear the weight of so much mass, whose
fame
When all was won, the Earth herself might
quake,
Supporting on her broad breast. Now they
take
Planks sawn and smoothed, and set them
over steam
Of cauldrons to be supple. These to the
beam
Above they rivet fast, and bend them down
Till from the belly more they seem to have
grown
Than in it to be ended, so well sunk
And grooved they be. There's for the
horse's trunk.
But as for head and legs, these from the block
Epeios carved, and fixed them on the stock
With long pins spigotted and clamps of
steel ;
And then the tail, downsweeping to the heel,
He carved and rivetted in place. Yet more
He did ; for cunningly he made a door
Beneath the belly of him, in a part
Where Nature lends her aid to sculptor's art,
And few would have the thought to look
for it,
Or eyes so keen to find, if they'd the wit.

Greatly stood he, hogmaned, with wrinkled
neck

And wrying jaw, as though upon the check
One rode him. On three legs he stood, with
one

Pawing the air, as if his course to run
Was overdue. Almost you heard the champ
And clatter of the bit, almost the stamp
And scrape of hoof; almost his fretful crest
He seemed to toss on high. So much confest
The wondering host. "But where's the man
to ride?"

They askt. Odysseus said, "He'll go inside.
Yet there shall seem a rider—nay, let two
Bespan so brave a back." Epeios anew
He spurred, and had his horsemen as he would,
Two noble youths, star-frontletted, but nude
Of clothing, and unarmed, who sat as though
Centaurs not men, and with their knees did
show

The road to travel. Next Odysseus bid,
"Gild thou me him, Epeios"; which he did,
And burnisht after, till he blazed afar
Like that great image which men hail for a
star

Of omen holy, image without peer,
Chryselephantine Athené with her spear,
Shining o'er Athens; to which their course
they set

When homeward faring through the seaways
wet

From Poros or from Nauplia, or some
From the Eubœan gulf, or where the foam
Washes the feet of Sounion, on whose brow
Like a white crown the shafts burn even now.

Such was the shaping of the Horse of Wood,
The bane of Ilios.

Ordered now they stood
Midway between the ships and Troy, and cast
The lots, who should go in from first to last
Of all the chieftains chosen. And the lot
Leapt out of Diomedes, so in he got
And sat up in the neck. Next Aias went,
Clasping his shins and blinking as he bent,
Working the ridges of his villainous brow,
Like puzzled, patient monkey on a bough
That peers with bald, far-seeing eyes, whose
scope

And steadfastness seem there to mock our
hope ;

Next Antiklos, and next Meriones
The Cretan ; next good Teukros. After
these

Went Pyrrhos, Agamemnon, King of men,
Menestheus and Idomeneus, and then
King Menelaus ; and Odysseus last
Entered the desperate doorway, and made
fast.

And all the Achaian remnant, seeing their
best

To this great venture finally address,
Stood awed in silence ; but Nestor the old

Bade bring the victims, and these on the wold
In sight of Troy he slew, and so uplift
The smoke of fire, and bloodsmoke, as a gift
Acceptable to Him he hailed by name
Kronion, sky-dweller, who giveth fame,
Lord of the thunder ; to Heré next, and
Her,

The Maid of War and holy harbinger
Of Father Zeus, who bears the Aegis dread
And shakes it when the storm peals overhead
And lightning splits the firmament with fire ;
Nor yet forgot Poseidon, dark-haired sire
Of all the seas, and of great Ocean's flow,
The girdler of the world. So back with slow
And pondered steps they all returned, and
dark

Swallowed up Troy, and Horse, and them
who stark

Abode within it. And the great stars shone
Out over sea and land ; and speaking none,
Nursing his arms, nursing within his breast
His enterprise, each hero sat at rest
Ignorant of the world of day and night,
Or whether he should live to see the light,
Or see it but to perish in this cage.
Only Odysseus felt his heart engage
The blithelier for the peril. He was stuff
That thrives by daring, nor can dare enough.

Three days, three nights before the Skaian
Gate

Sat they within their ambush, apt for fate ;
Three days, three nights, the Trojans swarmed
the walls

And towers or held high council in their
halls

What this portended, this o'erweening mass
Reared up so high no man stretching could
pass

His hand over the crupper, of such girth
Of haunch, to span the pair no man on earth
Could compass with both arms. But most
their eyes

Were for the riders who in godlike guise
Went naked into battle, as Gods use,
Untrammel'd by our shifts of shields and
shoes,

As if we dread the earth whereof we are.
Sons of God, these : for bore not each a star
Ablaze upon his forelock ? Lo, they say,
Kastor and Polydeukes, who but they,
Come in to save their sister at the last,
And war for Troy, and root King Priam
fast

In his demesne, him and his heirs for ever !
Now call they soothsayers to make endeavour
With engines of their craft to read the thing ;
But others urge them hale it to the King—
“ Let him dispose,” they say, “ of it and us,
And order as he will, from Pergamos
To heave it o'er the sheer and bring to
wreck ;

Or burn with fire ; or harbour to bedeck
The temple of some God : of three ways one.
Here it cannot abide to flout the sun
With arrogant flash for every beam of his."

Herewith agreed the men of mysteries,
Raking the bloodsick earth to have the truth,
And getting what they lookt for, as in sooth
A man will do. So then they all fell to't
To hale with cords and lever foot by foot
The portent ; and as frenzy frenzy breeds,
And what one has another thinks he needs,
So to a straining twenty other score
Lent hands, and ever from the concourse
more

Of them, who hauled as if Troy's life de-
pended

On hastening forward that wherein it ended.

So came the Horse to Troy, so was filled up
With retribution that sweet loving-cup
Paris had drunk to Helen overseas—
The cup which whoso drains must taste the
lees.

EIGHTH STAVE

THE HORSE IN TROY ; THE PASSION OF
KASSANDRA

HIGH over Troy the windy citadel,
Pergamos, towereth, where is the cell
And precinct of Athené. There, till reived,
They kept the Pallium, sacred and still
grieved

By all who held the city consecrate
To Her, as first it was, till she learned hate
For what had once been lovely, and let in
The golden Aphrodité, and sweet sin
To ensnare Prince Paris and send him awooing
A too-fair wife, to be his own undoing
And Troy's and all the line's of Dardanos,
That traced from Zeus to him, from him to
Tros,

From Tros to Ilos, to Laomedon,
Who begat Priam as his second son.
But out of Troy Assarakos too came,
From whom came Kapys ; and from him the
fame

Of good Anchises, with whom Kypris lay
In love and got Aineias. He, that day
Of dreadful wrath, safe only out did come,
And builded great Troy's line in greater
Rome.

Now to the forecourt flock the Trojan
folk
To view the portent. Now they bring to
yoke

Priam's white horses, that the stricken king
Himself may see the wonder-working thing,
Himself invoke with his frail trembling voice
The good Twin Brethren for his aid and
Troy's.

So presently before it Priam stands,
Father and King of Troy, with feeble hands
And mild pale eyes wherein Grief like a
ghost

Sits ; and about him all he has not lost
Of all his children gather, with grief-worn
Andromaché and her first, and last, born,
The boy Astyanax. And there apart
The wise Aineias stands, of steadfast heart
But not acceptable—for some old grudge
Inherited—Aineias, silent judge
Of folly, as he had been since the sin
Of Paris knelled the last days to begin.
But he himself, that Paris, came not out,
But kept his house in these his days of
doubt,
Uncertain of his footing, being of those

On whom the faintest breath of censure
blows

Chill as the wind that from the frozen North
Palsies the fount o' the blood. He dared not
forth

Lest men should see—and how not see? he
thought—

That Helen held him lightlier than she ought.

But Helen came there, gentle as of old,
Self-held, sufficient to herself, not bold,
Not modest nor immodest, taking none
For judge or jury of what she may have
done ;

But doing all she was to do, sedate,
Intent upon it and deliberate.

As she had been at first, so was she now
When she had put behind her her old vow
And had no pride but thinking of her new.
But she was lovelier, of more burning hue,
And in her eyes there shone, for who could
see,

A flickering light, half scare and half of glee,
Which made those iris'd orbs to wax and
wane

Like to the light of April days, when rain
And sun contend the sovereignty. She kept
Beside the King, and only closer crept
To let him feel her there when some harsh
word

Or look made her heart waver. Many she
heard,

And much she saw, but knew the King her
friend,

Him only since great Hector met his end.

And while so pensive and demure she stood,
With one thin hand just peeping at her hood,
The which close-folded her from head to
knee,

Her heart within her bosom hailed her—
“Free!

Free from thy thralldom, free to save, to give,
To love, be loved again, and die to live!”

So she—yet who had said, to see her there,
The sweet-faced woman, blue-eyed, still and
fair

As windless dawn in some quiet mountain
place,

To such a music let her passion race?

Now hath the King his witless welcome
paid,

And now invoked the gods, and the cold
shade

Which once was Hector; now, being upheld
By two his sons, with shaking hands of eld

The knees of those two carved and gilded
youths

He touches while he prays, and praying
soothes

The crying heart of Helen. But not so
Kassandra views him pray, that well of woe
Kassandra, she whom Loxias deceived

With gift to see, and not to be believed ;
To read within the heart of Time all truth
And see men blindly blunder, to have ruth,
To burn, to cry, "Out, haro!" and be a
mock—

Ah, and to know within this gross wood-
block

The fate of all her kindred, and her own,
Unthinkable! Now with her terror blown
Upon her face, to blanch it like a sheet,
Now with bare frozen eyes which only greet
The viewless neighbours of our world she
strips

The veil and shrieketh Troy's apocalypse :
"Woe to thee, Ilios! The fire, the fire!
And rain,

Rain like to blood and tears to drown the
plain

And cover all the earth up in a shroud,
One great death-clout for thee, Ilios the
proud!

Touch not, handle not——" Outraged then
she turned

To Helen—"O thou, for whom Troy shall
be burned,

O ruinous face, O breasts made hard with
gall,

Now are ye satisfied? Ye shall have all,
All Priam's sons and daughters, all his race
Gone quick to death, hailing thee, ruinous
face!"

Her tragic mask she turned upon all men :
“ The lion shall have Troy, to make his den
Within her pleasant courts, in Priam’s high
seat

Shall blink the vulture, sated of his meat ;
And in the temples emptied of their Gods
Bats shall make quick the night, and panting
toads

Make day a loathing to the light it brings.
Listen ! Listen ! they flock out ; heed
their wings.

The Gods flee forth of this accursèd haunt,
And leave the memory of it an old chant,
A nursery song, an idle tale that’s told
To children when your own sons are grown
old

In Argive bonds, and have no other joy
Than whispering to their offspring tales of
Troy.”

Whereat she laught—O bitter sound to
hear !

And struggled with herself, and grinned with
fear

And misery lest even now her fate
Should catch her and she be believed too late.
“ Is’t possible, O Gods ! Are ye so doomed
As not to know this Horse a mare, enwombed
Of men and swords ? Know ye not there
unseen

The Argive princes wait their dam shall
yea ?

Anon creeps Sparta forth, to find his balm
In that vile woman ; forth with itching palm
Mykenai creeps, snuffing what may be won
By filching ; forth Pyrrhos the braggart's
son

That dared do violence to Hector dead,
But while he lived called Gods to serve his
stead ;

Forth Aias like a beast, to mangle me—
These things ye will not credit, but I see.”
Then once again, and last, she turned her
switch

On Helen, hissing, “ Out upon thee, witch,
Smooth-handed traitress, speak thy secrets
out

That we may know thee, how thou goest
about

Caressing, with a hand that hides a knife,
That which shall prove false paramour, false
wife,

Fair as the sun is fair that smiles and slays”—
And then, “ O ruinous face, O ruinous
face ! ”

But nothing more, for sudden all was gone,
Spent by her passion. Muttering, faint and
wan

Down to the earth she sank, and to and fro
Rocking, drew close her hood, and shrouded
so,

Her wild voice drowning, died in moans
away.

But Helen stood bright-eyed as glancing
day,
Near by the Horse, and with a straying hand
Did stroke it here and there, and listening
stand,
Leaning her head towards its gilded flank,
And strain to hear men's breath behind the
plank ;
And she had whispered if she dared some
word
Of promise ; but afraid to be o'erheard,
Leaned her head close and toucht it with
her cheek,
Then drew again to Priam, schooled and
meek.
But Menelaus felt her touch, and mum
Sat on, nursing his mighty throw to come ;
And Aias started, with some cry uncouth
And vile, but fast Odysseus o'er his mouth
Clapt hand, and checkt his foul persever-
ance
To seek in every deed his own essence.

Now when the ways were darkened, and
the sun
Sank red to sea, and homeward all had gone
Save that distraught Kassandra, who still
served
The temple whence the Goddess long had
swerved,
Athené, hating Troy and loving them

Who craved to snatch and make a diadem
Of Priam's regal crown for other brows—
She, though foredoomed she knew, held to
her vows,

And duly paid the thankless evening rite—
There came to Paris' house late in the night
Deiphobus his brother, young and trim,
For speech with fair-tressed Helen, for whose
slim

And budded grace long had he sighed in
vain ;

And found her in full hall, and showed his
pain

And need of her. To whom when she
draws close

In hot and urgent crying words he shows
His case, hers now, that here she tarry not
Lest evil hap more dread than she can wot :
“For this,” he says, “is Troy's extremest
hour.”

But when to that she bowed her head, the
power

Of his high vision made him vehement :
“Dark sets the sun,” he cried, “and day is
spent” ;

But she said, “Nay, the sun will rise with
day,

And I shall bathe in light, lift hands and
pray.”

“Thou lift up hands, bound down to a
new lord !”

He mocked ; then whispered, " Lady, with
a sword
I cut thy bonds if so thou wilt."

Apart

She moved : " No sword, but a cry of the
heart
Shall loose me."

Then he said, " Hear what I cry
From my heart unto thine : fly, Helen, fly ! "
Whereat she shook her head and sighed,
" Even so,

Brother, I fly where thou canst never go.
Far go I, out of ken of thee and thy peers."

He knew not what she would, but said,
" Thy fears
Are of the Gods and holy dooms and Fate,
But mine the present menace in the gate.
This I would save thee."

" I fear it not," said she,

" But wait it here."

He cried, " Here shalt thou see
Thy Spartan, and his bitter sword-point feel
Against thy bosom."

" I bare it to the steel,"

Saith she. He then, " If ever man deserved
thee

By service, I am he, who'd die to serve thee."

Glowing she heard him, being quickly
moved

By kindness, loving ever where she was
loved.

But now her heart was fain for rest ; the
night

Called her to sleep and dreams. So with a
light

And gentle hand upon him, " Brother, fare-
well,"

She said, " I stay the issue, and foretell

Honour therein at least."

Then at the door

She kissed him. And she saw his face no
more.

NINTH STAVE

THE GODS FORSAKE TROY

Now Dawn came weeping forth, and on
the crest
Of Ida faced a chill wind from the West.
Forth from the gray sea wrack-laden it blew
And howled among the towers, and stronger
grew
As crept unseen the sun his path of light.
Then she who in the temple all that night
Had kept her rueful watch, the prophetess
Kassandra, peering sharply, heard the press
And rush of flight above her, and with sick
Foreboding waited ; and the air grew thick
With flying shapes immortal overhead.
As in late Autumn, when the leaves are
shed
And dismal flit about the empty ways,
And country folk provide against dark days,
And heap the woodstack, and their stores
repair,
Attent you know the quickening of the air,

And closer yet the swish and sweep and
swing
Of wings innumerable, emulous to bring
The birds to broader skies and kindlier sun,
And know indeed that winter is begun—
So seeing first, then hearing, she knew the
hour
Was come when Troy must fall, and not a
tower
Be left to front the morrow. And she
covered
Her head and mourned, while one by one
they hovered
Above their shrines, then flockt and faced
the dawn.

First, in her car of shell and amber,
drawn
By clustering doves with burnisht wings, a-
throng,
Passes Queen Aphrodité, and her song
Is sweet and sharp: "I gave my sacred
zone
To warm thy bosom, Helen which by none
That live by labour and in tears are born
And sighing go their ways, has e'er been
worn.
It kindled in thine eyes the lovelight, showed
Thy burning self in his. Thy body glowed
With beauty like to mine: mine thy love-
laughter

Thy cooing in the night, thy deep sleep
after,

Thy rapture of the morning, love renewed ;
And all the shadowed day to sit and brood
On what has been and what should be again :
Thou wilt not ? Nay, I proffer not in vain
My gifts, for I am all or will be nought.
Lo, where I am can be no other thought."

Thus to the wooded heights of Ida she
Was drawn, hid in that pearly galaxy
Of snow-white pigeons.

Next upon the height
Of Pergamos uplift a beam of light
That for its core enshrined a naked youth,
Golden and fierce. She knew the God sans
ruth,

Him who had given woeful prescience to
her,

Apollo, once her lover and her wooer ;
Who stood as one stands glorying in his
grace

And strength, full in the sun, though on her
place

Within the temple court no sun at all
Shone, nor as yet upon the topmost wall
Was any tinge of him, but all showed gray
And sodden in the wind and blown sea-
spray.

Not to him dared she lift her voice in
prayer,

Nor scarce her eyes to see him.

To him there
Came swift a spirit in shape of virgin slim,
With snooded hair and kirtle belted trim,
Short to the knee ; and in her face the gale
Had blown bright sanguine colour. Free
and hale

She was ; and in her hand she held a bow
Unstrung, and o'er her shoulders there did
go

A baldrick that made sharp the cleft betwixt
Her sudden breasts—to that a quiver fixt,
Showing gold arrow - points. No God
there is

In Heaven more swift than Delian Artemis,
The young, the pure health-giver of the
Earth,

Who loveth all things born, and brings to
birth,

And after slays with merciful sudden death—
In whom is gladness all and wholesome
breath,

And to whom all the praise of him who
writes,

Ever.

These two she saw like meteorites
Flare down the wind and burn afar, then
fade.

And Leto next, a mother grave and staid,
Drave out her chariot, which two winged
stags drew,

Swift following, robed in gown of inky blue,

And hooded ; and her hand which held the
hood

Gleamed like a patch of snow left in a wood
Where hyacinths bring down to earth the
sky.

And in her wake a winging company,
Dense as the cloud of gulls which from a
rock

At sea lifts up in myriads, if the knock
Of oars assail their peace, she saw, and
mourned

The household gods. For outward they
too turned,

The spirits of the streams and water-brooks,
And nymphs who haunt the pastures, or in
nooks

Of woodlands dwell. There like a lag of
geese

Flew in long straying lines the Oreades
That in wild dunes and commons have their
haunt ;

There sped the Hamadryads ; there aslant,
As from the sea, but wheeling ere they crost
Their sisters, thronged the river-nymphs, a
host ;

And now the Gods of homestead and the
hearth,

Like sad-faced mourning women, left the
garth

Where each had dwelt since Troy was
stablishéd,

And been the holy influence over bed
And board and daily work under the sun
And nightlong slumber when day's work was
done :

They rose, and like a driven mist of rain
Forsook the doomed high city and the plain,
And drifted eastaway ; and as they went
Heaviness spread o'er Ilios like a tent,
And past not off, but brooded all day long.

But ever coursed new spirits to the throng
That packt the ways of Heaven. From the
plain,

From mere and holt and hollow rose amain
The haunters of the silence ; from the
streams

And wells of water, from the country demes,
From plough and pasture, bottom, ridge
and crest

The rustic Gods rose up and joined the rest.
Like a long wisp of cloud from out his banks
Streamed Xanthos, that swift river, to the
ranks

Of flying shapes ; and driven by that same
mind

That urged him to it came Simoeis behind,
And other Gods and other, of stream and
tree

And hill and vale—for nothing there can be
On earth or under Heaven, but hath in it
Essence whereby alone its form may hit

Our apprehension, channelled in the sense
Which feedeth us, that we through vision
dense

See Gods as trees walking, or in the wind
That singeth in the bents guess what's
behind

Its wailing music.

And now the unearthly flock,
Emptying every water, wood, bare rock
And pasture, beset Ida, and their wings
Beat o'er the forest which about her springs
And makes a sea of verdure, whence she lifts
Her soaring peaks to bathe them in the
drifts

Of cloud, and rare reveal them unto men—
For Zeus there hath his dwelling, out of ken
Of men alike and gods. But now the brows,
The breasting summits, still eternal snows,
And all the faces of the mountain held
A concourse like in number to the field
Of Heaven upon some breathless summer
night

Printed with myriad stars, some burning
bright,

Some massed in galaxy, a cloudy scar,
And others faint, as infinitely far.

There rankt the Gods of Heaven, Earth, and
Sea,

Brethren of them now hastening from the fee
Of stricken Priam. Out of his deep cloud
Zeus flamed his levin, and his thunder loud

Volleyed his welcome. With uplifted hands
Acclaiming, God's oncoming each God stands
To greet. And thus the Hierarchy at one
Sits to behold the bitter business done
Which Paris by his luxury bestirred.

But in the city, like a stricken bird
Grieving her desolation and despair,
As voiceless and as lustreless, astare
For imminent Death, Cassandra croucht
beneath

Her very doom, herself the bride of Death ;
For in the temple's forecourt reared the mass
Of that which was to bring the woe to pass,
And hidden in him both her murderers
Wrung at their nails.

And slow the long day wears
While all the city broods. The chiefs keep
house,

Or gather on the wall, or make carouse
To simulate a freedom they feel not ;
And at street corners men in shift or plot
Whisper together, or in the market-place
Gather, and peer each other in the face
Furtively, seeking comfort against care ;
Whose eyes, meeting by chance, shift other-
where

In haste. But in the houses, behind doors
Shuttered and barred, the women scrub their
floors,

Or ply their looms as busily : for they

Ever cure care with care, and if a day
Be heavy lighten it with heavier task ;
And for their griefs wear beauty like a mask,
And answer heart's presaging with a song
On their brave lips, and render right for
wrong.

Little, by outward seeming, do they know
Of doom at hand, of fate or blood or woe,
Nor how their children, playing by their
knees,

Must end this day of busyness-at-ease
In shrieking night, with clamour for their
bread,

And a red bath, and a cold stone for a bed
Under the staring moon.

Now sinks the sun
Blood-red into the heavy sea and dun,
And forth from him, as he were stuck with
swords,

Great streams of light go upward. Then
the lords

Of havoc and unrest prepare their storms,
And o'er the silent city, vulture forms—

Eris and Enyo, Alké, Ioké,

The biter, the sharp-bitten, the mad, the
fey—

Hover and light on pinnacle and tower :
The gray Erinnyes, watchful for the hour
When Haro be the wail. And down the sky
Like a white squall flung Até with a cry

That sounded like the wind in a ship's
shrouds,
As shrill and wild at once. The driving
clouds
Surging together, blotted out the sea,
The beached ships, the plain with mound and
tree,
And slantwise came the sheeted rain, and
fast
The darkness settled in. Cassandra cast
Her mantle o'er her head, and with slow feet
Entered her shrine deserted, there to greet
Her fate when it should come ; and merciful
Sleep
Befriended her.

Now from his lair did creep
Odysseus forth unarmed, his sword and spear
There in the Horse, and warily to peer
And spy his whereabouts the Ithacan
Went doubtful. Then his dreadful work
began,
As down the bare way of steep Pergamos
Under the dark he sought for Paris' house.

TENTH STAVE

ODYSSEUS COMES AGAIN TO PARIS' HOUSE

THERE in her cage roamed Helen light and
fierce,
Unresting, with bright eyes and straining ears,
Nor ever stayed her steps ; but first the hall
She ranged, touching the pillars ; next to
the wall
Went out and shot her gaze into the murk
Whereas the ships should lie ; then to her
work
Upon the great loom turned and wove a
shift,
But idly, waiting always for some lift
In the close-wrapping fog that might discover
The moving hosts, the spearmen of her
lover—
Lover and husband, master and lord of life,
Coming at last to take a slave to wife.
And as wide-eyed she stared to feel her heart
Leap to her side, she felt the warm tears
start,

And thank't the Goddess for the balm they
brought.

Yet to her women, withal so highly wrought
By hope and care and waiting, she was mild
And gentle-voiced, and playful as a child
That sups the moment's joy, and nothing
heeds

Time past or time to come, but fills all needs
With present kindness. She would laugh
and talk,

Take arms, suffer embraces, even walk
The terrace 'neath the eyes of all her fate,
And seem to heed what they might show or
prate,

As if her whole heart's heart were in this
house

And not at fearful odds and perilous.

And should one speak of Paris, as to say,
"Would that our lord might see thee go so
gay

About his house!" Gently she'd bend her
head

Down to her breast and pluck a vagrant
thread

Forth from her tunic's hem, and looking
wise,

Gaze at her hand which on her bosom's rise
Lit like a butterfly and quivered there.

Now in the dusk, with Paris elsewhere
At council with the chieftains, into the hall
To Helen there, was come, adventuring all,

Odysseus in the garb of countryman,
A herdsman from the hills, with stain of tan
Upon his neck and arms, with staff and scrip,
And round each leg bound crosswise went a
strip

Of good oxhide. Within the porch he came
And louted low, and hailed her by her name,
Among her maidens easy to be known,
Though not so tall as most, and not full
blown

To shape and flush like a full-hearted rose ;
But like a summer wave her bosom flows
Lax and most gentle, and her tired sweet face
Seems pious as the moon in a blue space
Of starless heaven, and in her eyes the hue
Of early morning, gray through mist of blue.
Not by a flaunted beauty is she guessed
Queen of them all, but by the right expressed
In her calm gaze and fearless, and that hold
Upon her lips which Gods have. Nay, not
cold,

Thou holy one, not cold thy lips, which say
All in a sigh, and with one word betray
The passion of thy heart ! But who can wis
The fainting piercing message of thy kiss ?
O blest initiate—let him live to tell
Thy godhead, show himself thy miracle !

But when she saw him there with his head
bowed
And humble hands, deeply her fair face
glowed,

And broad across the iris swam the black
Until her eyes showed darkling. "Friend,
your lack

Tell me," she said, "and what is mine to
give

Is yours ; but little my prerogative
Here in this house, where I am not the
queen

You call me, but another name, I ween,
Serves me about the country you are of,
Which Ilios gives me too, but not in love.

Yet are we all alike in evil plight,
And should be tender of each other's right,
And of each other's wrongdoing, and wrongs
done

Upon us. Have you wife and little one
Hungry at home ? Have you a son afield ?
Or do you mourn ? Alas, I cannot wield
The sword you lack, nor bow nor spear
afford

To serve . . ."

He said, "Nay, you can sheathe the sword,
Slack bowstring, and make spear a hunter's
toy.

Lady, I come to end this war of Troy
In your good pleasure."

With her steady eyes
Unwinking fixt, "Let you and me devise,"
Said she, "this happy end of bow and spear,
So shall we serve the land. You have my
ear ;

Speak then."

"But so," he said, "these maidens have it.
But we save Troy alone, or never save it."

Turning she bid them leave her with a
nod,
And they obeyed. Swift then and like a
God

She seemed, with bright all-knowing eyes and
calm

Gesture of high-held head, and open palm
To greet. "Laertes' son, what news bringst
thou?"

"Lady," he said, "the best. The hour is
now.

We stand within the heaven-establish'd walls,
We gird the seat. Within an hour it falls,
The seat divine of Dardanos and Tros,
After our ten years' travail and great loss
Of heroes not yet rested, but to rest
Soon."

Then she laid her hand upon her breast
To stay it. "Who are ye that stand here-
by?"

"Desperate men," he said, "prepared to
die

If thou wilt have it so. Chief is there
none

Beside the ships but Nestor. All are gone
Forth in the Horse. Under thy covering
hand

Thou holdest all Achaia. Here we stand,

Epeios, Pyrrhos, Antiklos, with these
Cretan Idomeneus, Meriones,
Aias the Lokrian, Teukros, Diomed
Of the loud war-cry, next thy man indeed,
Golden-haired Menelaus the robbed King,
And Agamemnon by him, and I who bring
This news and must return to take what lot
Thou choosest us; for all is thine, God
wot,

To end or mend, to make or mar at will."

A weighty utterance, but she heard the
thrill

Within her heart, and listened only that—
To know her love so near. So near he sat
Hidden when she that toucht the Horse's
flank

Could have toucht him! "Odysseus!" her
voice sank

To the low tone of the soft murmuring dove
That nests and broods, "Odysseus, heard
my love

My whisper of his name when close I stood
And stroked the Horse?"

"I heard and understood,"

He said, "and Lokrian Aias would have
spoken

Had I not clapt a hand to his mouth—else
broken

By garish day had been our house of dream,
And our necks too. I heard a woman scream
Near by and cry upon the Ruinous Face,

But none made answer to her."

Nought she says
To that but "I am ready ; let my lord
Come when he will. Humbly I wait his
word."

"That word I bring," Odysseus said, "he
comes.

Await him here."

Her wide eyes were the homes
Of long desire. "Ah, let me go with thee
Even as I am ; from this dark house take
me

While Paris is abroad ! "

He shook his head.

"Not so, but he must find thee here abed—
And Paris here."

The light died out ; a mask
Of panic was her face, what time her task
Stared on a field of white horror like blood :
"Here ! But there must be strife then ! "

"Well and good,"

Said he.

Then she, shivering and looking small,
"And one must fall?" she said ; he, "One
must fall."

Reeling she turned her pincht face other
way

And muttered with her lips, grown cold and
gray,

Then fawning came at him, and with her
hands

Besought him, but her voice made no
demands,

Only her haunted eyes were quick, and prayed,
“ Ah, not to fall through me ! ”

“ By thee,” he said,
“ The deed is to be done.”

She droopt adown
Her lovely head ; he heard her broken moan,
“ Have I not caused enough of blood-
shedding,

And enough women’s tears ? Is not the
sting

Sharp enough of the knife within my side ? ”
No more she could.

Then he, “ Think not to avoid
The lot of man, who payeth the full price
For each deed done, and riddeth vice by
vice :

Such is the curse upon him. The doom is
By God decreed, that for thy forfeit bliss
In Sparta thou shalt pay the price in Troy,
Dishonour for lost honour, pain for joy ;
By what hot thought impelled, by that alone
Win back ; by violence violence atone.

If by chicane thou fleddest, by chicane
Win back thy blotted footprints. Out again
With all thine arts of kisses slow and long,
Of smiles and stroking hands, and crooning
song

Whenas full-fed with love thou lulledst
asleep ;

Renew thine eyebright glances, whisper and
creep
And twine about his neck thy wreathing
arms :
As we with spears so do thou with thy
charms,
Arm thee and wait the hour of fire and smoke
To purge this robbery. Paris by the stroke
Of him he robbed shall wash out his old
cheat
In blood, and thou, woman, by new deceit
Of him redeem thy first. For thus God
saith,
Traitor, thou shalt betray thy thief to
death."

He ceased, and she by misery made wild
And witless, shook, and like a little child
Gazed piteous, and asked, "What must I
do?"

He answered, "Hold him by thee, falsely
true,
Until the King stand armed within the house
Ready to take his blood-price. Even thus,
By shame alone shalt thou redeem thy
shame."

And now she claspt his knee and cried his
name :
"Mercy ! I cannot do it. Let me die
Sooner than go to him so. What, must I lie
With one and other, make myself a whore,
And so go back to Sparta, nevermore

To hold my head up level with my slaves,
Nor dare to touch my child ?”

Said he, “ Let knaves
Deal knavishly till freedom they can win ;
And so let sinners purge themselves of sin.”
Then fiercely looking on her where she
croucht

Fast by his knees, his whole mind he avoucht :
“ How many hast thou sent the way of death
By thy hot fault ? What ghosts like wander-
ing breath

Shudder and wail unhouseled on the plain,
Shreds of Achaian honour ? What hearts in
pain

Cry the night through ? What souls this
very night

Fare forth ? Art thou alone to sup delight,
Alone to lap in pleasantness, who first
And only, with thy lecher and his thirst,
Wrought all the harm ? Only for thy
smooth sake

Did Paris reive, and Menelaus ache,
And Hector die ashamed, and Peleus’ son
Stand to the arrow, and Aias Telamon
Find madness and self-murder for the crown
Of all his travail ?” He eyed her up and
down

Sternly, as measuring her worth in scorn.
“ Not thus may traffic any woman born
While men endure cold nights and burning
days,

Hunger and wretchedness."

She stands, she says,
"Enough—I cannot answer. Tell me plain
What I must do."

"At dark," he said, "we gain
The Gates and open them. A trumpet's
blast

Will sound the entry of the host. Hold fast
Thy Paris then. We storm the citadel,
High Pergamos; that won, the horn will tell
The sack begun. But hold thou Paris bound
Fast in thine arms. Once more the horn
shall sound.

That third is doom for him. Release him
then."

All blank she gazed. "Unarmed to face
armed men?"

"Unarmed," he said, "to meet his judgment
day."

Now was thick silence broken; now no
way

For her to shift her task nor he his fate.

Keenly she heeds. "'Tis Paris at the gate!
What now? Whither away? Where wilt
thou hide?"

He lookt her in the face. "Here I abide
What he may do. Was it not truth I
spake

That all Hellas lay in thy hand? Now take
What counsel or what comfort may avail."

Paris stood in the door and cried her
Hail.

“Hail to thee, Rose of the World!” then
saw the man,
And knit his brows upon him, close to scan
His features; but Odysseus had his hood
Shadowing his face. Some time the Trojan
stood

Judging, then said, “Thou seek’st? What
seekest thou?”

“A debt is owed me. I seek payment
now.”

So he was told; but he drew nearer yet.

“I would know more of thee and of thy
debt,”

He said.

And then Odysseus, “This thy strife
Hath ruined all my fields which are my life,
Brought murrain on my beasts, cold ash to
my hearth,

Emptiness to my croft. Hunger and dearth,
Are these enough? Who pays me?”

Then Paris,

“I pay, but first will know what man it is
I am to pay, and in what kind.” So said,
Snatching the hood, he whipt it from his head
And lookt and knew the Ithacan. “Now
by Zeus,

Treachery here!” He swung his sword-
arm loose

Forth of his cloak and set hand to his sword;

But Helen softly called him : "Hath my
lord

No word of greeting for his bondwoman ?"
Straightway he went to her, and left the man,
And took her in his arms, and held her close.
And light of foot, Odysseus quit the house.

ELEVENTH STAVE

THE BEGUILING OF PARIS

Now Paris tipt her chin and turned her
face
Upwards to his that fondly he might trace
The beauty of her budded lips, and stoop
And kiss them softly ; and fingered in the
loop
That held her girdle, and closer pressed, on
fire,
Towards her ; for her words had stung desire
Anew ; and wooing in his fond boy's way,
Whispered and lookt his passion ; then to
pray
Began : " Ah, love, long strange to me,
behold
Thy winter past, and come the days of gold
And pleasance of the spring ! For in thine
eyes
I see his light and hail him as he flies !
Nay, cloud him not, nor veil him "—for she
made

To turn her face, saying, "Ah, let them
fade :

The soul thou prisonest here is grayer far."

But he would give no quarter now. "O
star,

O beacon-star, shine on me in the night
That I may wash me in thy bath of light,
Taking my fill of thee ; so cleanséd all
And healed, I rise renewed to front what call
May be !" which said, with conquest in his
bones

And in his eyes assurance, in high tones
He called her maids, bade take her and
prepare

The couch, and her to be new-wedded there ;
For long had they been strangers to their
bliss.

So by the altar standeth she submiss
And watchful, praying silent and intense
To a strange-figured Goddess, to his sense
Who knew but Aphrodité. "Love, what
now ?

Who is thy God ? What secret rite hast
thou ?"

For grave and stern above that altar stood
Heré the Queen of Heaven.

In dry mood
She answered him, "Chaste wives to her do
pray

Before they couch, Blest be the strife ! You
say

We are to be new-wedded. Pour with me
Libation that we love not fruitlessly."

So said, she took the well-filled cup and
poured,
And prayed, saying, "O Mother, not
abhorred

Be this my service of thee. Count it not
Offence, nor let my prayers be forgot
When reckoning comes of things done and
not done

By me thy child, or to me, hapless one,
Unloving paramour and unloved wife!"

"Heré, to thee for issue of the strife!"
Cried Paris then, and poured. So Helen
went

And let her maids adorn her to his bent.

Then took he joy of her, and little guessed
Or cared what she might give or get. Possess
Her body by his body, but her mind
Searcht terribly the issue. As one blind
Explores the dark about him in broad day
And fingers in the air, so as she lay
Lax in his arms, her fainting eyes, aglaze
For terror coming, sought escape all ways.
Alas for her! What way for woman fair,
Whose joy no fairer makes her than despair?
Her burning lips that kisses could not cool,
Her beating heart that not love made so full,
The surging of her breast, her clinging hands:
Here are such signs as lover understands,

But fated Paris nowise. Her soul, distraught
To save him, proved the net where he was
caught.

For more she anguisht lest love be his bane
The fiercelier spurred she him, to make him
fain

Of that which had been ruinous to all.

But all the household gathered on the wall
While these two in discordant bed were
plight,

And watcht the Achaian fires. No beacon-
light

Showed by the shore, but countless, flickering,
streamed

Innumerable lights, wove, dipt and gleamed
Like fireflies on a night of summer heat,
Withal one way they moved, though many
beat

Across and back, and mingled with the rest.
Anon a great glare kindled from the crest
Of Ida, and was answered by a blaze
Behind the ships, which threw up in red haze
Huge forms of prow and beak. Then from
the Mound

Of Ilos fire shot up, from sacred ground,
And out the mazy glory of moving lights
One sped and flared, as of the meteorites
In autumn some fly further, brighter courses.
A chariot! They heard the thunder of the
horses;

And as they flew the torch left a bright wake.

And thus to one another woman spake,
"Lo, more lights race! They follow him,
they near,
Catch and draw level. Hark! Now you
can hear
The tramp of men!"

Says one, "That baleful sheen
Is light upon their spears. The Greeks, I
ween,

Are coming up to rescue or requite."

But then her mate: "They mass, they fill
the night
With panic terror."

True, that all night things
Fled as they came. They heard the flickering
wings

Of countless birds in haste, and as they flew
So fled the dark away. Light waxed and
grew

Until the dead of night was vivified
And radiant opened out the countryside
With pulsing flames of fire, which gleamed
and glanced,

Flickered, wavered, yet never stayed advance.
As the sun rising high o'er Ida cold
Beats a sea-path in flakes of molten gold,
So stretcht from shore to Troy that litten
stream

That moved and shuddered, restless as a
dream,

Yet ever nearing, till on spear and shield

They saw light like the moon on a drowned
field,

And in the glare of torches saw and read
Gray faces, like the legions of the dead,
Silent about the walls, and waiting there.

But in the fragrant chamber Helen the fair
Lay close in arms, and Paris slept, his head
Upon her bosom, deep as any dead.

Sudden there smote the blast of a great
horn,
Single, long-held and shuddering, and far-
borne ;

And then a deathless silence. Paris stirred
On that soft pillow, and listened while they
heard

Many men running frantically, with feet
That slapt the stones, and voices in the
street

Of question and call—"Oh, who are ye that
run ?

What of the night?" "O peace!" And
some lost one

Wailed like a woman, and her a man did
curse,

And there were scuffling, prayers, and then
worse—

A silence. But the running ended not
While Paris lay alistening with a knot
Of Helen's loose hair twisting round his
finger.

“O love,” he murmured low, “I may not linger.

The street’s awake. Alas, thou art too kind
To be a warrior’s bride.” Sighing, she
twined

Her arm about his neck and toucht his face,
And pressed it gently back to its warm place
Of pillowing. And Paris kissed her breast
And slept ; but her heart’s riot gave no rest
As quaking there she lay, awaiting doom.

Then afar off rose clamour, and the room
Was fanned with sudden light and sudden
dark,

As on a summer night in a great park
Blazed forth you see each tuft of grass or
mound,

Anon the drowning blackness, while the sound
Of Zeus’s thunder hardens every close :

So here the chamber glared, then dipt, and
rose

That far confuséd tumult, and now and then
The scurrying feet of passion-driven men.

Thrilling she waited with sick certainty
Of doom inexorable, while the struck city
Fought its death-grapple, and the windy
height

Of Pergamos became a shambles. White
The holy shrines stared on a field of blood,
And with blank eyes the emptied temples
stood

While murder raved before them, and below

And all about the city ran the woe
Of women for their children. Then the
flame

Burst in the citadel, and overcame
The darkness, and the time seemed of broad
day.

And Helen stared unwinking where she lay
Pillowing Paris.

Now glad and long and shrill
The second trumpet sounds. They have the
hill—

High Troy is down, is down! Starting, he
wakes

And turns him in her arms. His face she
takes

In her two hands and turns it up to hers.
Nothing she says, nothing she does, nor stirs
From her still scrutiny, nor so much as blinks
Her eyes, deep-searching, of whose blue he
drinks,

And fond believes her all his own, while she
Marvels that aught of his she e'er could be
In times bygone. But now he is on fire
Again, and urges on her his desire,
And loses all the sense of present needs
For him in burning Troy, where Priam bleeds
Head-smitten, trodden on his palace-floor,
And white Cassandra yieldeth up her flower
To Aias' lust, and of the Dardan race
Survive he only, renegade disgrace,
He only and Aineias the wise prince.

But now is crying fear abroad and wins
The very household of the shameful lover ;
Now are the streets alive, for worse in cover
Like a trapt rat to die than fight the odds
Under the sky. Now women shriek to the
Gods,

And men run witlessly, and in and out
The Greeks press, burning, slaying, and the
rout

Screameth to Heaven. As at sea the mews
Pack, their wings battling, when some fresh
wrack strews

The tideway, and in greater haste to stop
Others from prey, will let their morsel drop,
And all the while make harsh lament—so here
The avid spoilers bickered in their fear
To be manœuvred out of robbery,
And tore the spoil, and mangled shamefully
Bodies of men to strip them, and in haste
To forestall ravishers left the victims chaste.
Ares, the yelling God, and Até white
Swept like a snow-storm over Troy that night ;
And towers rockt, and in the naked glare
Of fire the smoke climbed to the upper air ;
And clamour was as of the dead broke loose.

But Menelaus his stern way pursues,
And to the wicked house with chosen band
Cometh, his good sword naked in his hand ;
And now, while Paris loves and holds her fast
In arms, the third horn sounds a shattering
blast,

Long-held, triumphant ; and about the door
Gathers the household, to cry, to pray, to
 implore,
And at the last break in and scream the
truth—

“The Greeks ! The Greeks ! Save your-
selves !”

 Then in sooth
Starts Paris out of bed, and as he goes
Sees in the eyes of Helen all she knows
And all believes ; and with his utter loss
Of her rises the man in him that was
Ere luxury had entered blood and bone
Of him. No word he said, but let one groan,
And turned his dying eyes to hers, and read
Therein his fate, that to her he was dead,
Long dead and cold in grave. Whereat he
 past
Out of the door, and met his end at last
As man, not minion.

 But the woman fair
Lay on her face, half buried in her hair,
Naked and prone beneath her saving sin,
Not yet enheartened new life to begin.

ENVOY

BUT thou didst rise, Maid Helen, as from
sleep,

A final tryst to keep

With thy true lover, in whose hands thy life

Lay, as in arms ; his wife

In heart as well as deed ; his wife, his friend,

His soul's fount and its end !

For such it is, the marriage of true minds,

Each in each sanction finds ;

So if her beauty lift her out of thought

Whither man's to be brought

To worship her perfection on his knees,

So in his strength she sees

Self glorified, and two make one clear orb

Whereinto all rays absorb

Which stream from God and unto God

return.—

So, as he fared, I yearn

To be, and serve my years of pain and loss

'Neath my walled Ilios,

With my eyes ever fixt to where, a star,

Thou and thy sisters are,

Helen and Beatrice, with thee embraced,

Hands in thy hands, and arms about thy
waist.

HYPSIPYLE

QUEEN of the shadows, Maid and Wife,
Twifold in essence, as in life,
The lamp of Death, the star of Birth,
Half cradled and half mourned by Earth,
By Hell half won, half lost ! aid me
To sing thy fond Hypsipyle,
Thy bosom's mate who, unafraid,
Renounced for thee what part she had
In sun and wind upon the hill,
In dawn about the mere, in still
Woodlands, in kiss of lapping wave,
In laughter, in love—all this she gave !—
And shared thy dream-life, visited
The sunless country of the dead,
There to abide with thee, their Queen,
In that gray region, shadow-seen
By them that cast no shadows, yet
Themselves are shadows. Nor forget,
Koré, her love made manifest
To thee, familiar of her breast
And partner of her whispering mouth.

Thee too, Our Lady of the South,
Uranian Kypris, I invoke,
Regent of starry space, with stroke
Of splendid wing, in whose white wake
Stream those who, filled with thee, forsake
Their clinging shroudy clots, and rise,
Lover and loved, to thy pure skies,
To thy blue realm ! O lady, touch
My lips with rue, for she loved much.

What poet in what cloistered nook,
Indenting in what roll of a book
His rhymes, can voice the tides of love ?
Nay, thrilling lark, nay, moaning dove,
The nightingale's full-chargéd throat
That cheereth now, and now doth gloat,
And now recordeth bitter-sweet
Longing, too wise to image it :
These be your minstrels, lovers ! Choose
From their winged choir your urgent Muse ;
Let her your speechless joys relate
Which men with words sophisticate,
Striving by reasons make appear
To head what heart proclaims so clear
To heart ; as if by wit to wis
What mouth to mouth tells in a kiss,
Or in their syllogisms dry
Freeze a swift glance's cogency.
Nay, but the heart's so music-fraught,
Music is all in love, words naught.
One heart's a rote, with music stored

Though mute ; but two hearts make a chord
Of piercing music. One alone
Is nothing : two make the full tone.

I

On Enna's uplands, on a lea
Between the mountains and the sea,
Shadowed anon by wandering cloud,
Or flickering wings of birds a-crowd,
And now all golden in the sun,
See Koré, see her maidens run
Hither and thither through those hours
Of dawn among the wide-eyed flowers,
While gentian, crocus, asphodel
(With rosy star in each white bell),
Anemone, blood-red with rings
Of paler fire, that plant that swings
A crimson cluster in the wind
They pluck, or sit anon to bind
Of these earth-stars a coronet
For their smooth-tresséd Queen, who yet
Strays with her darling interlaced,
Hypsipyle the grave, the chaste—
Her whose gray shadow-life with his
Who singeth now for ever is.

She, little slim thing, Koré's mate,
Child-faced, gray-eyed, of sober gait,
Of burning mind and passion pent
To image-making, ever went
Where wonned her Mistress ; for those two

By their hearts' grace together grew,
The one to need, the one to give
(As women must if they would live,
Who substance win by waste of self
And only spend to hoard their pelf :
"O heart, take all of mine !" "O heart,
That which thou tak'st of thee is part—
No robbery therefore : mine is thine,
Take then !") : so she and Proserpine
Intercommunion'd each bright day,
And when night fell together lay
Cradled in arms, or cheek to cheek
Whispered the darkness out. Thou meek
And gentle vision ! let me tell
Thy beauties o'er I love so well :
Thy sweet low bosom's rise and fall,
Pulsing thy heart's clear madrigal ;
Or how the blue beam from thine eyes
Imageth all love's urgencies ;
Thy lips' frail fragrance, as of flowers
Remembered in penurious hours
Of winter-exile ; of thy brow,
Not written as thy breast of snow
With love's faint charact'ry, for his wing
Leaves not the heart long ! Last I sing
Thy thin quick fingers, in whose pleaching
Lieth all healing, all good teaching—
Wherewith, touching my discontent,
I know how thou art eloquent !

Remember'd joy, Hypsipyle !
Now may that serve to comfort me,

While I, O Maiden dedicate,
Seek voice for singing thy gray Fate !

Now, as they went, one heart in two,
Brusht to the knees by flowers, by dew
Anointed, by the wind caressed,
By the light kissed on eyes and breast,
'Twas Koré talked ; Hypsipyle
Listened, with eyes far-set, for she
Of speech was frugal, voicing low
And rare her heart's deep underflow—
Content to lie, like fallow sweet
For rain or sun to cherish it,
Or scattered seed substance to find
In her deep-funded, quiet mind.
And thus the Goddess : “ Blest art thou,
Hypsipyle, who canst not know
Until the hour strikes what must come
To pass ! But I foresee the doom
And stay to meet it. Even here
The place, and now the hour ! ” Then fear
Took her who spake so fearless, cold
Threaded her thronging veins—behold !
A hand on either shoulder stirs
That slim, sweet body close to hers,
And need fires need till, lip with lip,
They seal and sign their fellowship,
While Koré, godhead all forgot,
Clings whispering, “ Child, leave me not
Whenas to darkness and the dead
I go ! ” And clear the answer sped

From warm mouth murmuring kiss and cheer,
"Never I leave thee, O my dear!"
Thereafter stand they beatingly,
Not speaking; and the hour draws nigh.

And all the land shows passing fair,
Fair the broad sea, the living air,
The misty mountain-sides, the lake
Flecked blue and purple! To forsake
These, and those bright flower-gatherers
Scattered about this land of theirs,
That stoop or run, that kneel to pick,
That cry each other to come quick
And see new treasure, unseen yet!
Remembered joy—ah, how forget!

But mark how all must come to pass
As was foreknowned. In the grass
Whereas the Goddess and her mate
Stood, one and other, prompt for fate—
Listless the first and heavy-eyed,
Astrain the second—she espied
That strange white flower, unseen before,
With chalice pale, which thin stalk bore
And swung, as hanging by a hair,
So fine it seemed afloat in air,
Unlinkt and wafted for the feast
Of some blest mystic, without priest
Or acolyte to tender it:
Whereto the maid did stoop and fit
Her hand about its silken cup

To close it, that her mouth might sup
The honey-drop within. The bloom
Saw Koré then, and knew her doom
Foretold in it ; and stood in trance
Fixed and still. No nigromance
Used she, but read the fate it bore
In seedless womb and petals froze.
Chill blew the wind, waiting stood She,
Waiting her mate, Hypsipyle.

Then in clear sky the thunder tolled
Sudden, and all the mountains rolled
The dreadful summons round, and still
Lay all the lands, only the rill
Made tinkling music. Once more drave
Peal upon peal—and lo ! a grave
Yawned in the Earth, and gushing smoke
Belched out, as driven, and hung, and broke
With sullen puff ; like tongues the flame
Leapt following. Thence Aidoneus came,
Swart-bearded king, with iron crown'd,
In iron mailed, his chariot bound
About with iron, holding back
Amain two steeds of glistening black
And eyeballs white-rimmed fearfully,
And nostrils red, and crests flying free ;
Who held them pawing at the verge,
Tossing their spume up, as the surge
Flung high against some seaward bluff.
Nothing he spake, or smooth or gruff,
But drave his errand, gazing down

Upon the Maid, whose blown back gown
Revealed her maiden. Still and proud
Stood she among her nymphs, unbowed
Her comely head, undimmed her eye,
Inseparate her lips and dry,
Facing his challenge of her state,
Neither denying, nor desperate,
Pleading no mercy, seeing none,
Her wild heart masked in face of stone.
But they, her bevy, clustered thick
As huddled sheep, set their eyes quick,
And held each other, hand or waist,
Paling or flushing as fear raced
Thronging their veins — they knew not,
they,
The gathered fates that broke this day,

And all the land seemed passing fair
To one who knew, and waited there.

“Goddess and Maid,” then said the King,
“Long have I sought this day should bring
An end of torment. Know me thou
God postulant, with whom below
A world awaits her queen, while here
I seek and find one without peer ;
Nor deem her heedless nor unschooled
In what in Heaven is writ and ruled.
Decreed of old my bride-right was,
Decreed thy Mother’s pain and loss,
Decreed thy loathing, and decreed

That which thou shunnest to be thy need ;
For thou shalt love me, Lady, yet,
Though little liking now, and fret
Of jealous care shall grave thy heart
And draw thee back when time's to part—
If fond Demeter have her will
Against thine own."

The Maid stood still
And guarded watched, and her proud eyes'
Scrutiny bade his own advise
Whether indeed their solemn stare
Saw Destiny and read it there
Beyond her suitor, or within
Her own heart heard the message ring.
Awhile she gazed : her stern aspect,
Young and yet fraught with Godhead, checkt
Both Him who claimed, and her who'd cling,
And them who wondered. "O great King,"
She said, and mournful was her crying
As when night-winds set pine-trees sighing,
"King of the folk beyond the tide
Of sleep, behold thy chosen bride
Not shunning thee, nor seeking. Take
That which Gods neither mar nor make,
But only They, the Three, who spin
The threads which hem and mesh us in,
Both Gods and men, till she who peers
The longest cuts them with her shears.
Take, take, Aidoneus, and take her,
My fosterling."

Then He, "O star
Of Earth, O Beacon of my days,
Light of my nights, whose beamy rays
Shall pierce the foggy cerement
Wherein my dead grope and lament
Beyond all loss the loss of light,
Come! and be pleasant in my sight
This thy beloved. Perchance she too
Shall find a suitor come to woo;
For love men leave not with their bones—
That is the soul's, and half atones
And half makes bitterer their loss,
Remembering what their fortune was."

Trembling Hypsipyle uplift
Her eyes towards the hills, where swift
The shadows flew, but no more fleet
Than often she with flying feet
And flying raiment, she with these
Her mates, whom now estranged she sees—
As if the shadow-world had spread
About her now, and she was dead—
Her mates no more! cut off by fear
From these two fearless ones. A tear
Welled up and hovered, hung a gem
Upon her eyelid's dusky hem,
As raindrops linkt and strung arow
Broider with stars the winter bough.
This was her requiem and farewell
To them, thus rang she her own knell;
Nor more gave she, nor more asked they,
But took and went the fairy way.

For thus with unshed tears made blind
Went she : thus go the fairy kind
Whither fate driveth ; not as we
Who fight with it, and deem us free
Therefore, and after pine, or strain
Against our prison bars in vain.
For to them Fate is Lord of Life
And Death, and idle is a strife
With such a master. They not know
Life past, life coming, but life now ;
Nor back look they to long, nor forth
To hope, but sup the minute's worth
With draught so quick and keen that each
Moment gives more than we could reach
In all our term of three-score years,
Whereof full score we give to fears
Of losing them, and other score
Dreaming how fill the twenty more.

Now is the hour, Bride of the Night !
The chariot turns, the great steeds fight
The rocky entry ; flies the dust
Behind the wheels at each fierce thrust
Of giant shoulder, at each lunge
Of giant haunch. Down, down they plunge
Into the dark, with rioting mane,
And the earth's door shuts-to again.
Now fly, ye Oreads, strain your arms,
Let eyes and hair voice your alarms—
Hair blown back, mouths astretch for fear,
Strained eyeballs—cry that Mother dear
Her daughter's rape ; fly like the gale

That down the valleys drives the hail
In scurrying sheets, and lays the corn
Flat, which when man of woman born
Seeth, he bows him to the grass,
Whispering in hush, *The Oreads pass.*
(In shock he knows ye, and in mirth,
Since he is kindred of that earth
Which bore ye in her secret stress,
Images of her loveliness,
To her dear paramour the Wind.)
Follow me now that car behind.

II

O ye that know the fairy throng,
And heed their secret under-song ;
In flower or leaf's still ecstasy
Of birth and bud their passion see,
In wind or calm, in driving rain
Or frozen snow discern them strain
To utter and to be ; who lie
At dawn in dewy brakes to spy
The rapture of their flying feet—
Follow me now those coursers fleet,
Sucked in their wake, down ruining
Through channelled night, where only sing
The shrill gusts streaming through the hair
Of them who sway and bend them there,
And peer in vain with shielded eyes
To rend the dark. Clinging it lies,
Thick as wet gossamer that shrouds

October brushwoods, or low clouds
That from the mountain tops roll down
Into the lowland vales, to drown
Men's voices and to choke their breath
And make a silence like to death.
But this was hot and dry ; it came
And smote them, like the gush of flame
Fanned in a smithy, that outpours
And floods with fire the open doors.

Downward their course was, swift as flight
Of meteor flaring through the night,
Steady and dreadful, with no sound
Of wheels or hoofs upon the ground,
Nor jolt, nor jar ; for once past through
Earth's portals, steeds and chariot flew
On wings invisible and strong
And even-oaring, such as throng
The nights when birds of passage sweep
O'er cities and the folk asleep :
Such was their awful flight. Afar
Showed Hades glimmering like a star
Seen red through fog : and as they sped
To that, the frontiers of the dead
Revealed their sullen leagues and bare,
And sad forms flitting here and there,
Or clustered, waiting who might come
Their empty ways with news of home.
Yet all one course at length must hold,
Or late or soon, and all be tolled
By Charon in his dark-prowed boat.
Thither was swept the chariot

And crossed dry-wheeled the coiling flood
Of Styx, and o'er the willow wood
And slim gray poplars which do hem
The further shore, Hell's diadem—
So by the tower foursquare and great
Where King Aïdoneus keeps his state
And rules his bodyless thralls they stand.

Dark ridge and hollow showed the land
Fold over fold, like waves of soot
Fixt in an anguish of pursuit
For evermore, so far as eye
Could range ; and all was hot and dry
As furnace is which all about
Etna scorcheth in days of drouth,
And showeth dun and sinister
That fair isle linked to main so fair.
Nor tree nor herbage grew, nor sang
Water among the rocks : hard rang
The heel on metal, or on crust
Grew tender, or went soft in dust ;
Neither for beast nor bird nor snake
Was harbourage ; nor could such slake
Their thirst, nor from the bitter heat
Hide, since the sun not furnished it ;
But airless, shadowless and dense
The land lay swooning, dead to sense
Beneath that vault of stuprous black,
Motionless hanging, without wrack
Of cloud to break and pass, nor rent
To hint the blue. Like the foul tent

A foul night makes, it sagged ; for stars
Showed hopeless faces, with two scars
In each, their eyes' immortal woe,
Ever to seek and never know :
In all that still immensity
These only moved—these and the sea,
Which dun and sullen heaved, with surge
And swell unseen, save at the verge
Where fainted off the black to gray
And showed such light as on a day
Of sun's eclipse men tremble at.

Here the dead people moved or sat,
Casting no shadow, hailing none
Boldly ; but in fierce undertone
They plied each other, or on-spied
Their way with signal of the head
For answer, or arms desperate
Flung up, or shrug disconsolate.
And this the quest of every one :
“What hope have ye?” And answer,
“None.”

Never passed shadow shadow but
That answer got to question put.
In that they lived, in that, alas !
Lovely and hapless, Thou must pass
Thy days, with this for added lot—
Aching, to nurse things unforgot.

Remember'd joy, Hypsipyle !
The Oread choir, the Oread glee :

The nimble air of quickening hills,
The sweet dawn light that floods and fills
The hollowed valleys ; the dawn wind
That bids the world wake, and on blind
Eyelids of sleeping mortals lays
Cool palms that urge them see and praise
The Day-God coming with the sun
To hearten toil ! He warned you run
And hide your beauties deep in brake
Of fern or briar, or reed of lake,
Or in wet crevice of the rock,
There to abide until the clock
You reckon by, with shadowy hands,
Lay benediction on the lands
And landsmen, and the eve-jar's croak
Summon ye, lightfoot fairy folk,
To your activity full tide
Over the empty earth and wide.
Here be your food, fair nymph, and coy
Of mortal ken—remember'd joy !

Remember'd joy ! Ah, stormy nights,
Ah, the mad revel when wind fights
With wind, and slantwise comes the rain
And shatters at the window-pane,
To wake the hind, who little knows
Whose fingers drum those passionate blows,
Nor what swift indwellers of air
Ye be who hide in forms so fair
Your wayward motions, cruel to us,
While lovely, and dispiteous !

Ah, nights of flying scud and rout
When scared the slim young moon rides out
In her lagoon of open sky,
Or older, marks your revelry
As calm and large she oars above
Your drifting lives of ruth or love.
Boon were those nights of dusted gold
And glint of fireflies! Boon the cold
And witching frost! All's one, all's one
To thee, whose nights and days go on
Now in one span of changeless dusk
On one earth, crackling like the husk
Of the dropt mast in winter wood:
Remember'd joy—'tis all thy food,
Hypsipyle, to whose fond sprite
I vow my praise while I have light.

Dumbly she wandered there, as pale
With lack of light, with form as frail
As those poor hollow congeners
Whose searching eyes encountered hers,
Petitioning as mute as she
Some grain of hope, where none might be,
Daring not yet to voice their moan
To her whose case was not their own;
For where they go like breath in a shell
That wails, my love goes quick in Hell.

Alas, for her, the sweet and slim!
Slowly she pines; her eyes grow dim
With seeking; her smooth, sudden breasts

Hang languidly ; those little nests
For kisses which her dimples were,
In cheeks graved hollow now by care
Vanish, and sharply thrusts her chin,
And sharp her bones of arm and shin.
Reproach she looks, about, above,
Denied her light, denied her love,
Denied for what she sacrificed,
Doomed to be fruitless agonist.
(O God, and I must see her fade,
Must see and anguish—in my shade !)

Nor help nor comfort gat she now
From her whose need called forth her vow ;
For close in arms Queen Koré dwelt
In that great tower Aïdoneus built
To cherish her ; deep in his bed,
Loved as the Gods love whom they wed ;
Turned from pale maiden to pale wife,
Pale now with love's insatiate strife
First to appease, and then renew
The wild desire to mingle two
Natures, to long, to seek, to shun,
To have, to give, to make two one
That must be two if they would each
Learn all the lore that love can teach.
So strove the mistress, while the maid
Went alien among the dead,
Unspoken, speaking none, but watcht
By them who knew themselves outmatcht
By her, translated whole, nor guessed
What miseries gnawed within that breast,

Which could be toucht, which could give
meat

To babe ; which was not eye-deceit
As theirs, poor phantoms. So went she
Grudged but unscathed beside the sea,
Or sat alone by that sad strand
Nursing her worn cheek in her hand ;
And did not mark, as day on day
Lengthened the arch of changeless gray,
How she was shadowed, how to her
Stretcht arms another prisoner ;
Nor knew herself desirable
By any thankless guest of Hell—
Withal each phantom seemed no less
Whole-natured to her heedlessness.

Midway her round of solitude
She used to haunt a dead sea-wood
Where among boulders lifeless trees
Stuck rigid fingers to the breeze—
That stream of faint hot air that flits
Aimless at noon. 'Tis there she sits
Hour after hour, and as a dove
Croons when her breast is ripe for love,
So sings this exile, quiet, sad chants
Of love, yet knows not what she wants ;
And singing there in undertone,
Is one day answered by the moan
Of hidden mourner ; but no fear
Hath she for sound so true, though near ;
Nay, but sings out her elegy,

Which, like an echo, answers he.
Again she sings ; he suits her mood,
Nor breaks upon her solitude :
So she, choragus, calls the tune,
And as she leads he follows soon.
As bird with bird vies in the brake,
She sings no note he will not take—
As when she pleads, “ Ah, my lost love,
The night is dark thou art not of,”
Quick cometh answering the phrase,
“ O love, let all our nights be days ! ”
This, rapt, with beating heart, she heeds
And follows, “ Sweet love, my heart bleeds !
Come, stay the wound thyself didst give ” ;
Then he, “ I come to bid thee live.”
And so they carol, and her heart
Swells to believe his counterpart,
And strophé striketh clear, which he
Caps with his brave antistrophe ;
And as a maiden waxes bold,
And opens what should not be told
When all her auditory she sees
Within her mirror, so to trees
And rocks, and sullen sounding main
She empties all her passioned pain ;
And “ love, love, love,” her burden is,
And “ I am starving for thee,” his.
Moved, melted, all on fire she stands,
Holding abroad her quivering hands,
Raises her sweet eyes faint with tears
And dares to seek him whom she hears ;

And from her parted lips a sigh
Stealeth, as knowing he is nigh
And her fate on her—then she'd shun
That which she seeks ; but the thing's done.

Hollow-voiced, dim, spake her a shade,
" O thou that comest, nymph or maid—
If nymph, then maiden, since for aye
Virgin is immortality,
Nor love can change what Death cannot—
Look on me by love new-begot ;
Look on me, child new-born, nor start
To see my form who knowest my heart ;
For it is thine. O Mother and Wife,
Take then my love—thou gavest it life ! "

So spake one close : to whom she lent
The wonder of her eyes' content—
That lucent gray, as if moonlight
Shone through a sapphire in the night—
And saw him faintly imaged, rare
As wisp of cloud on hillside bare,
A filamental form, a wraith
Shaped like that man who in the faith
Of one puts all his hope : who stood
Trembling in her near neighbourhood,
A thing of haunted eyes, of slim
And youthful seeming ; yet not dim,
Yet not unmanly in his fashion
Of speech, nor impotent of passion—

The which his tones gave earnest of
And his aspect of hopeless love ;
Who, drawing nearer, came to stand
So close beside her that one hand
Lit on her shoulder—yet no touch
She felt : “ O maiden overmuch,”
He grieved, “ O body far too sweet
For such as I, frail counterfeit
Of man, who yet was once a man,
Cut off before the midmost span
Of mortal life was but half run,
Or ere to love he had found one
Like thee—yet happy in that fate,
That waiting, he is fortunate :
For better far in Hell to fare
With thee than commerce elsewhere,
Sharing the snug and fat outlook
Of bed and board and ingle-nook
With earth-bound woman, earth-born child.
Nay, but high love is free and wild
And centreth not in mortal things ;
But to the soul giveth he wings,
And with the soul strikes partnership,
So may two let corruption slip
And breasting level, with far eyes
Lifted, seek haven in the skies,
Untrammel'd by the earthly mesh.
O thou,” said he, “ of fairy flesh,
Immortal prisoner, take of me
Love ! 'tis my heritage in fee ;
For I am very part thereof,

And share the godhead."

So his love
Pled he with tones in love well-skilled
Which on her bosom beat and thrilled,
And pierced. No word nor look she had
To voice her heart, or sad or glad.
Rapt stood she, wooed by eager word
And by her need, whose cry she heard
Above his crying ; but she guessed
She was desired, beset, possessed
Already, handfasted to sight,
And yielding so, her heart she plight.

Thus was her mating : of the eyes
And ears, and her love half surmise,
Detected by her burning face
Which saw, not felt, his fierce embrace.
For on her own she knew no hand
When caging it he seemed to stand,
And round her waist felt not the warm
Sheltered peace of the belting arm
She saw him clasp withal. When rained
His words upon her, or eyes strained
As though her inmost shrine to pierce
Where hid her heart of hearts, her ears
Conceived, although her body sweet
Might never feel a young life beat
And leap within it. Ah, what cry
That mistress e'er heard poet sigh
Could voice thy beauty ? Or what chant
Of music be thy ministrant ?

Since thou art Music, poesy
Must both thy spouse and increase be !

In the hot dust, where lizards crouch
And pant, he made her bridal couch ;
Thither down drew her to his side
And, phantom, taught her to be bride
With words so ardent, looks so hot
She needs must feel what she had not,
Guess herself in beleaguered bed
And throb response. Thus she was wed.
As she whom Zeus loved in a cloud,
So lay she in her lover's shroud,
And o'er her members crept the chill
We know when mist creeps up a hill
Out of the vale at eve. As grows
The ivy, rooting as it goes,
In such a quick close envelope
She lay aswoon, nor guessed the scope
Nor tether of his hot intent,
Nor what to that inert she lent,
Save when at last with half-turned head
And glimmering eyes, encompasséd
She saw herself, a bride possest
By ghostly bridegroom, held and prest
To unfelt bosom, saw his mouth
Against her own, which to his drouth
Gave no allay that she could sense,
Nor took of her sweet recompense.
So moved by pity, stirred by rue,
Out of their onslaught young love grew.

Love that with delicate tongues of fire
Can kindle hearts inflamed desire
In her for him who needed it ;
And so she claimed and by eyes' wit
Had what she would : and now made war,
Being, as all sweet women are,
Prudes till Love calls them, and then fierce
In love's high calling. Thus with her ears
She fed on love, and to her eyes
Lent deeds of passionate emprise—
Till at the last, the shadowy strife
Ended, she owned herself all wife.

High mating of the mind ! O love,
Since this must be, on this she throve !
Remember'd joy, Hypsipyle,
Since this must be, O love, let be !

OREITHYIA

OREITHYIA, by the North Wind carried
To stormy Thrace from Athens where you
tarried

Down by Ilissus all a blowy day
Among the asphodels, how rapt away
Thither, and in what frozen bed wert
married?

“I was a King’s tall daughter still unwed,
Slim and desirable my locks to shed
Free from the fillet. He my maiden belt
Undid with busy fingers hid but felt,
And made me wife upon no marriage bed.

“As idly there I lay alone he came
And blew upon my side, and beat a flame
Into my cheeks, and kindled both my eyes.
I suffered him who took no bodily guise:
The light clouds know whether I was to
blame.

“Into my mouth he blew an amorous breath;
I panted, but lay still, as quiet as death.

The whispering planes and sighing grasses
know

Whether it was the wind that loved me so :
I know not—only this, ‘O love,’ he saith,

“ ‘O long beset with love, and overloved,
O easy saint, untempted and unproved,
O walking stilly virgin ways in hiding,
Come out, thou art too choice for such
abiding !

She never valued ease who never roved.

“ ‘Thou mayst not see thy lover, but he now
Is here, and claimeth thy low moonlit brow,
Thy wonderful eyes, and lips that part and
pout,
And polished throat that like a flower shoots
out
From thy dark vesture folded and crossed
low.’

“ With that he had his way and went his way ;
For Gods have mastery, and a maiden’s nay
Grows faint ere it is whispered all. I sped
Homeward with startled face and tiptoe tread,
And up the stair, and in my chamber lay.

“ Crouching I lay and quaked, and heard the
wind
Wail round the house like a mad thing
confined,

And had no rest ; turn wheresoe'er I would
This urgent lover stormed my solitude
And beat against the haven of my mind.

“ And over all a clamour and dis-ease
Filled earth and air, and shuddered in my
 knees
So that I could not stand, but by the wall
Leaned pitifully breathing. Still his call
Volleyed against the house and tore the trees.

“ Then out my turret-window as I might
I leaned my body to the blind wet night ;
That eager lover leapt me, circled round,
Wreathed, folded, held me prisoner, wrapt
 and bound
In manacles of terror and delight.

“ That night he sealed me to him, and I went
Thenceforth his leman, submiss and content ;
So from the hall and feast, whenas I heard
His clear voice call, I flitted like a bird
That beats the brake, and garnered what he
 lent.

“ I was no maid that was no wife ; my days
Went by in dreams whose lights are golden
 haze
And skies are crimson. Laughing not, nor
 crying,

I strayed all witless with my loose hair flying,
Bearing that load that women think their
praise.

“And felt my breasts grow heavy with that
food

That women laugh to feel and think it good ;
But I went shamefast, hanging down my head,
With girdle all too strait to serve my stead,
And bore an unguessed burden in my blood.

“There was a winter night he came again
And shook the window, till cried out my
pain

Unto him, saying, ‘Lord, I dare not live !
Lord, I must die of that which thou didst
give !

Pity me, Lord !’ and fell. The winter rain

“Beat at the casement, burst it, and the wind
Filled all the room, and swept me white and
blind

Into the night. I heard the sound of seas
Beleaguer earth, I heard the roaring trees
Singing together. We left them far behind.

“And so he bore me into stormy Thrace,
Me and my load, and kissed back to my face
The sweet new blood of youth, and to my
limbs

The wine of life ; and there I bore him twins,
Zethes and Calaïs, in a rock-bound place."

Oreithyia, by the North Wind carried
To stormy Thrace, think you of how you
tarried

And let him woo and wed? "Ah, no, for
now

He's kissed all Athens from my open brow.
I am the Wind's wife, wooed and won and
married."

CLYTIÉ

HEARKEN, O passers, what thing
Fortuned in Hellas. A maid,
Lissom and white as the roe,
Lived recess'd in a glade.
Clytié, Hamadryad,
She was called that I sing—
Flower so fair, so frail, that to bring her a woe,
Surely a pitiful thing !

A wild bright creature of trees,
Brooks, and the sun among leaves,
Clytié, grown to be maid :
Ah, she had eyes like the sea's
Iris of green and blue !
White as sea-foam her brows,
And her hair reedy and gold :
So she grew and waxt supple and fit to be
 spouse
In a king's palace of old.

All in a kirtle of green,
With her tangle of red-gold hair,

In the live heart of an oak,
Clytié, harbouring there,
Thronéd there as a queen,
Clytié wondering woke :
Ah, child, what set thee too high for thy
sweet demesne,
And who ponder'd the doleful stroke ?

For the child that was maiden grown,
The queen of the forest places,
Clytié, Hamadryad,
Tired of the joy she had,
And the kingdom that was her own ;
And tired of the quick wood-races,
And joy of herself in the pool when she
wonder'd down,
And tired of her budded graces.

And the child lookt up to the Sun
And the burning track of his car
In the broad serene above her :
“ O King Sun, be thou my lover,
For my beauty is just begun.
I am fresh and fair as a star ;
Come, lie where the lilies are :
Behold, I am fair and dainty and white all over,
And I waste in the wood unknown ! ”

Rose-flusht, daring, she strain'd
Her young arms up, and she voiced
The wild desire of her heart.

The woodland heard her, the faun,
The satyr, and things that start,
Peering, heard her; the dove, crooning,
complain'd

In the pine-tree by the lawn.
Only the runnel rejoiced
In his rushy hollow apart
To see her beauty flash up
White and red as the dawn.

Sorrow, ye passers-by,
The quick lift of her word,
The crimson blush of her pride !
Heard her the heavens' lord
In his flaming seat in the sky :
"Overbold of her years that will not be
denied ;
She would be the Sun-God's bride !"
His brow it was like the flat of a sword,
And levin the glance of his side.

And he bent unto her, and his mouth
Burnt her like coals of fire ;
He gazed with passionate eyes,
Like flame that kindles and dries,
And his breath suckt hers as the white rage
of the South
Draws life ; his desire
Was like to a tiger's drouth.
What shall the slim maiden avail ?
Alas, and alas for her youth !

Tremble, O maids, that would set
Your love-longing to the Sun !
For Clytié mourn, and take heed
How she loved her king and did bleed
Ere kissing had yet begun.
For lo ! one shaft from his terrible eyes she
met,
And it burnt to her soul, and anon
She paled, and the fever-fret
Did bite to her bones ; and wan
She fell to rueing the deed.

Mark ye, maidens, and cower !
Lo, for an end of breath,
Clytié, hardy and frail,
Anguisht after her death.
For the Sun-flower droops and is pale
When her king hideth his power,
And ever draggeth the woe of her piteous
tale,
As a woman that laboureth
Yet never reacheth the hour :
So Clytié yearns to the Sun, for her wraith
Moans in the bow'd sunflower.

Clytié, Hamadryad,
Called was she that I sing :
Flower so fair and frail that to work her
this woe,
Surely a pitiful thing !

LAI OF GOBERTZ¹

OF courteous Limozin wight,
Gobertz, I will indite :
From Poicebot had he his right
 Of gentlehood ;
Made monk in his own despite
In San Léonart the white,
Withal to sing and to write
 Coblas he could.

Learning had he, and rare
Music, and *gai saber* :
No monk with him to compare
 In that monast'ry.
Full lusty he was to bear
Cowl and chaplet of hair
God willeth monks for to wear
 For sanctity.

There in dortoir as he lay,
To this Gobertz, by my fay,

¹ I owe the substance of this *lai* to my friend Ezra Pound, who unearthed it, *ψαμάθω ειλυμένα πολλῇ*, in some Provençal repertory.

Came fair women to play
 In his sleep ;
Then he had old to pray,
Fresh and silken came they,
With eyen saucy and gray
 That set him weep.

May was the month, and soft
The singing nights ; up aloft
The quarter moon swam and scoffed
 His unease.
Rose this Gobertz, and doffed
His habit, and left that croft,
Crying *Eleison* oft
 At Venus' knees.

Heartly the road and the town
Mauléon, over the down,
Sought he, and the renown
 Of Savaric ;
To that good knight he knelt down,
Asking of him in bown
Almesse of laurel crown
 For his music.

Fair him Savaric spake,
" If *coblas* you know to make,
Song and music to wake
 For your part,
Horse and lute shall you take

Of *Jongleur*, lightly forsake
Cloister for woodland brake
 With good heart."

Down the high month of May
Now rideth Gobertz his way
To Aix, to Puy, to Alais,
 To Albi the old ;
In Toulouse mindeth to stay
With Count Simon the Gay,
There to abide what day
 Love shall hold.

Shrill riseth his song :
Cobla, lai, or tenzon,
None can render him wrong
 In that *meinie*—
Love alone, that erelong
Showed him in all that throng
Of ladies Tibors the young,
 None but she.

She was high-hearted and fair,
Low-breasted, with hair
Gilded, and eyes of vair
 In burning face:
On her Gobertz astare,
Looking, stood quaking there
To see so debonnair
 Hold her place.

Proud *donzela* and free,
To clip nor to kiss had she
Talént, nor for minstrelsy
Was she fain ;
Mistress never would be,
Nor master have ; but her fee
She vowed to sweet Chastity,
Her suzerain.

Then this Gobertz anon
Returneth to Mauléon,
To Savaric maketh moan
On his knees.
Other pray'r hath he none
Save this, " Sir, let me begone
Whence I came, since fordone
My expertise."

Quod Savaric, " Hast thou sped
So ill in *amors* ? " Answeréd
This Gobertz, " By my head,
She scorneth me."
" *Hauberc* and arms then, instead
Of lute and begarlanded
Poll, take you," he said,
" For errantry."

Now rides he out, a dubbed knight,
The Spanish road, for to fight
Paynimry ; day and night
Urgeth he ;

In Saragoza the bright,
And Pampluna with might
Seeketh he what respite
For grief there be.

War-dimmed grew his gear,
Grim his visage ; in fear
Listened Mahound his cheer
Deep in Hell.
Fled his legions to hear
Gobertz the knight draw near.
Now he closeth the year
In Compostell.

Offering there hath he made
Saint James, candles him paid,
Gold on the shrine hath laid ;
Now Gobertz
Is for Toulouse, where that maid
Tibors wonned unafraid
Of Love and his accolade
That breaketh hearts.

He rode north and by east,
Nor rider spared he nor beast,
Nor tempered spur till at least
Forth of Spain ;
Not for mass-bell nor priest,
For fast-day nor yet for feast
Stayed he, till voyage ceased
In Aquitaine.

Now remaineth to tell
What this Gobertz befell
When that he sought hostel
In his land.

Dined he well, drank he well,
Envy then had somedeal
With women free in *bordel*
For to spend.

In poor *alberc* goeth he
Where bought pleasure may be,
Careless proffereth fee
For his bliss.

O Gobertz, look to thee.
Such a sight shalt thou see
Will make the red blood to flee
Thy heart, ywis.

Fair woman they bring him in
Shamefast in her burning sin,
All afire is his skin

Par amors.

Look not of her look to win,
Dare not lift up her chin,
Gobertz ; in that soiled fond thing
Lo, Tibors !

“O love, O love, out, alas !
That it should come to this pass,
And thou be even as I was
In green youth,

Whenas delight and solace
Served I with wantonness,
And burned anon like the grass
To this ruth ! ”

But then lift she her sad eyes,
Gray like wet morning skies,
That wait the sun to arise,
Tears to amend.
“ Gobertz, *amic*,” so she cries,
By Jesus’ agonies
Hither come I by lies
Of false friend.

“ Sir Richart de Laund he hight,
Who fair promised me plight
Of word and ring, on a night
Of no fame ;
So then evilly bright
Had his will and delight
Of me, and fled unrequite
For my shame !

“ Alas, and now to my thought
Flieth the woe that I wrought
Thee, Gobertz, that distraught
Thou didst fare.
Now a vile thing of nought
Fare I that once was so haught
And free, and could not be taught
By thy care.”

But Gobertz seeth no less
Her honour and her sweetness,
Soon her small hand to kiss
 Taketh he,
Saying, "Now for that stress
Drave thee here thou shalt bless
God, for so ending this
 Thy penury."

Yet she would bid him away,
Seeking her sooth to say,
In what woful array
 She was cast.
"Nay," said he, "but, sweet may,
Here must we bide until day :
Then to church and to pray
 Go we fast."

Now then to all his talént,
Seeing how he was bent,
Him the comfort she lent
 Of her mind.
Cried Gobertz, well content,
"If love by dreariment
Cometh, that was well spent,
 As I find."

Thereafter somewhat they slept,
When to his arms she had crept
For comfort, and freely wept
 Sin away.

Up betimes then he leapt,
Calling her name : forth she stept
Meek, disposed, to accept
 What he say.

By hill road taketh he her
To the gray nuns of Beaucaire,
There to shred off her hair
 And take veil.
Himself to cloister will fare
Monk to be, with good care
For their two souls. May his pray'r
 Them avail !

THE SAINTS' MAYING

SINCE green earth is awake
Let us now pastime take,
Not serving wantonness
Too well, nor niggardness,
Which monks of men would make.

But clothed like earth in green,
With jocund hearts and clean,
We will take hands and go
Singing where quietly blow
The flowers of Spring's demesne.

The cuckoo haileth loud
The open sky ; no cloud
Doth fleck the earth's blue tent ;
The land laughs, well content
To put off winter shroud.

Now, since 'tis Easter Day,
All Christians may have play ;
The young Saints, all agaze
For Christ in Heaven's maze,
May laugh who wont to pray.

Then welcome to our round
They light on homely ground :—
Agnes, Saint Cecily,
Agatha, Dorothy,
Margaret, Hildegonde ;

Next come with Barbara
Lucy and Ursula ;
And last, queen of the Nine,
Clear-eyed Saint Catherine
Joyful arrayeth her.

Then chooseth each her lad,
And after frolic had
Of dance and carolling
And playing in a ring,
Seek all the woodland shade.

And there for each his lass
Her man a nosegay has,
Which better than word spoken
Might stand to be her token
And emblem of her grace.

For Cecily, who bent
Her slim white neck and went
To Heaven a virgin still,
The nodding daffodil,
That bends but is not shent.

Lucy, whose wounded eyes
Opened in Heaven star-wise,

The lady-smock, whose light
Doth prank the grass with white,
Taketh for badge and prize.

Because for Lord Christ's hest
Men shore thy warm bright breast,
Agatha, see thy part
Showed in the burning heart
Of the white crocus best.

What fate was Barbara's
Shut in the tower of brass,
We figure and hold up
Within the stiff king-cup
That crowns the meadow grass.

Agnes, than whose King Death
Stayed no more delicate breath
On earth, we give for dower
Wood-sorrel, that frail flower
That Spring first quickeneth.

Dorothy, whose shrill voice
Bade Heathendom rejoice,
The sweet-breath'd cowslip hath ;
And Margaret, who in death
Saw Heaven, her pearly choice.

Then she of virgin brood
Whom Prince of Britain woo'd,
Ursula, takes by favour

The hyacinth whose savour
Enskies the sunny wood.

Hildegonde, whose spirit high
The Cross did not deny,
Yet blusht to feel the shame,
Anemones must claim,
Whose roses early die.

Last, she who gave in pledge
Her neck to the wheel's edge,
Taketh the fresh primrose
Which (even as she her foes)
Redeems the wintry hedge.

So garlanded, entwined,
Each as may prompt her mind,
The Saints renew for Earth
And Heaven such seemly mirth
As God once had design'd.

And when the day is done,
And veil'd the goodly Sun,
Each man his maid by right
Doth kiss and bid Good-night ;
And home goes every one.

The maids to Heaven do hie
To serve God soberly ;
The lads, their loves in Heaven,
What lowly work is given
They do, to win the sky.

THE ARGIVE WOMEN¹

CHTHONOË
RHODOPE
GORGO

MYRTILLA
PASIPHASSA
SITYS

SCENE

The women's house in the House of Paris in Troy.

TIME.—The Tenth year of the War.

Helen's women are lying alone in the twilight hour. Chthonoë presently rises and throws a little incense upon the altar flame. Then she begins to speak to the Image of Aphrodite in a low and tired voice.

CHTHONOË

GODDESS of burning and little rest,
By the hand swaying on thy breast,
By glancing eye and slow sweet smile

¹ *Helen Redeemed*, the first poem in this book, was originally conceived as a drama. Here is a scene from it, the first after the Prologue, which would have been spoken by Odysseus. The action of the play would have begun with the entry of Helen.

Tell me what long look or what guile
Of thine it was that like a spear
Pierced her heart, who caged me here
In this close house, to be with her
Mistress at once and prisoner !

Far from earth and her pleasant ways
I lie, whose nights are as my days
In this dim house, where on the wall
I watch the shadows rise and fall
And know not what is reckt or done
By men and horses out in the sun,
Nor heed their traffic, nor their cheer
As forth they go or back, but hear
The fountain plash into the pond,
The brooding doves, and sighs of fond
Lovers whose lips yearn as they sever
For longer joy, joy such as never
Hath man but in the mind. But what
Men do without, that I know not
Who see them but as shadows thrown
Upon a screen. I see them blown
Like clouds of flies about the plain
Where the winds sweep them and make vain
Their panoplies. They hem the verge
Of this high wall to guard us—urge
Galloping horses into war
And meet in shock of battle, far
Below us and our dreams : withal
Ten years have past us in this thrall
Since Helen came with eyes agleam
To Troy, and trod the ways of dream.

GORGO

Men came about us, crying, "The Greeks!
Ships out at sea with high-held peaks
Like questing birds!" But I lay still
Kissing, nor turned.

RHODOPE

So I, until
The herald broke into my sleep,
Crying Agamemnon on the deep
With ships from high Mykenai. Then
I minded he was King of Men—
But not of women in the arms
They loved.

MYRTILLA

I heard their shrill alarms
Faint and far off, like an old fame.
Below this guarded house men came—
Chariots and horses clasht; they cried
King Agamemnon in his pride,
Or Hector, or young Diomede;
But I was kissing, could not heed
Aught save the eyes that held mine bound.
Anon a hush—anon the sound
Of hooves resistless, pounding—a cry,
"Achilles! Save yourselves!" But I—
Clinging I lay, and sighed in sign
That love must weary at last, even mine—
Even mine, Sweetheart!

PASIPHASSA

Who watcht when flared
 Lord Hector like a meteor, dared
 The high stockade and fired the ships ?
 I watcht his lips who had had my lips.

SITYS

And when he slew Menoikios' son,
 Sister, what then ?

PASIPHASSA

My cheek was wan
 For lack of kissing—so I blew
 On slumbering lids to draw anew
 The eyes of him who had loved me well,
 But now was faint.

CHTHONOË

O Kypris, tell
 The deeds of men, not lovers !

RHODOPE

Here
 Came one all palsied in his fear,
 Chattering and white, to Paris abed,
 Flusht in his sleep—told Hector dead,
 Dead and dishonoured, while he slept.
 He sighed and turned. But Helen wept.

GORGO

Not I. I turned and felt warm draught
Of breath upon my cheek, and laught
Softly, and snuggling, slept.

CHTHONOË

Fie, fie !

Goddess, drugged in thy dreams we lie,
Logs, not women, logs in the sun !

SITYS

Thou art sated. So fretteth One,
The very fount of Love's sweet well,
The chord of Love made visible,
Sickened of her own loveliness,
Haggard as hawk too long in jess,
Aching for flight.

MYRTILLA

Recall the bout
When Paris armed him and went out
Into the lists, and all men thronged
To see——

SITYS

Lord Paris and him he wronged
Fight for her, who should have her ! We
stood
Upon the walls, and she with her hood

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Close to her cheek. But I saw the flicker
In her blue eyes !

PASIPHASSA

But I was quicker,
And saw the man she looked upon,
And after what her blue eyes shone
Like cyanus in morning light.

GORGO

Husband and lover she saw fight,
Man to man, with death between.

RHODOPE

Hatred coucht, as long and lean
As a lone wolf, on her man's crest—

PASIPHASSA

And bit the Trojan !

CHTHONOË

Thine was the rest,
Goddess ! And Helen lit the fire,
With her disdain, of his desire.

MYRTILLA

Her eyes burned like the frosty stars
Of winter midnight.

PASIPHASSA

His the scars !
Bitten in his wax-pale cheek.

CHTHONOË

Nay, in his heart——

SITYS

Nay, in his bleak
And writhen smile you see it !

GORGO

Nay !
In his sick soul.

RHODOPE

Let him go his way !
Hear my thought of a happier thing—
Sparta's trees in flood of spring
Where Eurotas' banks abrim
Drown the reeds, and foam-clots swim
Like a scattered brood of duck !

MYRTILLA

Flowers anod ! White flowers to pluck,
Stiffened in the foamy curds !
Ah, the green thickets quick with birds !

SITYS

Calling Itys ! Itys ! Itys !

PASIPHASSA

She calls not here—her house it is
In Sparta !

RHODOPE (*with a sob*)
Peace !

CHTHONOË

From my heart a cry—
Send me back, Goddess, ere I die
To those dear places and clean things—
To see my people, feel the wings
Of the gray night fold over me,
And touch my mother's knees, and be
Her child, as long ago I was
Before I lay burning in Ilios !

[*They hide their faces in their knees.
Then one by one they sing.*]

Let me sing an old sweet air,
Mother of Argos, to Thee,
For hope in my heart is fair
As light on the hills seen from afar at sea ;
And my weary eyes turn there
As to the haven where my soul would be.

RHODOPE

I will arise and make choice
The house of my tumbled breast,
For she cometh, I hear the voice

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Of her wings of healing, and she shall be my
guest ;
And my joys shall be her joys,
And my home her home, O wind of the
South West !

GORGON

As a bird that listens and thrills,
Hidden deep in the night,
For the sound of the little rills
That run musically towards the light ;
As a hart to the high hills
Turneth his dying eyes, my soul takes flight.

MYRTILLA

Ah, to be folded deep
In the shade of Taygetus,
In my mother's arms to sleep
Even as a child when I lay harboured thus !
Oh, that I were as thy sheep,
Lacedaemon, my land, cradle and nurse of us !

PASIPHASSA

In Argos they sow the grain,
In Troy blood is their sowing ;
There a green mantle covers the plain
Where the sweet green corn and sweet short
grass are growing ;
But here passion and pain—
Blood and dust upon earth, and a hot wind
blowing.

SITYS

To the hold on the far red hill
From the hold on the wide green lea,
Over the running water, follow who will
Therapnae's hawk with the dove of Amyklæe.
But I would lie husht and still,
And feel the new grass growing quick over
me !

*[The scene grows dark as they sit.
Their eyes are full of tears.
Presently one looks up, listening,
then another, then another. They
are all alert.]*

CHTHONOË

Who prayeth peace ? I feel her peace
Steal through me as a quiet air
Enters the house with sweet increase
Of light to healing, praise to prayer !

RHODOPE

What do I know of guiltiness
When she is here, and with grave eyes
Seeketh the ways of quietness
And lampeth them ?

GORGO

Arise, arise !

[They all stand waiting.]

MYRTILLA

Hark ! Her footfall like the dew—

PASIPHASSA

As a flower by frost made sere
Long before the sun breaks through,
Feeleth him, I know her near.

[Helen stands in the doorway.]

CHTHONOË

This is she, the source of light,
Source of light and end of it,
Argive Helen, slim and sweet,
For whose bosom and delight,
For whose eyes, those wells of peace,
Paris wrought, as well he might,
Ten years' woe for Troy and Greece.

RHODOPE

Starry wonder that she was,
Caged like sea-bird in his arms,
See her passion thrill, then pass
From him who, doting on her charms,
So became abominable.
Watch her bosom dip and swell,
See her nostrils fan and curve
At his touch who loved not well,

But loved too much, who broke the spell ;
Watch her proud head stiffen and swerve.

GORGO

Upon the wall with claspt white hands
See her vigil keep intent,
Argive Helen, lo ! she stands
Looking seaward where the fires
Hem the shore innumerable ;
Sign of that avenging host,
All Achaia's chivalry,
Past the tongue of man to tell,
Peers and kindred of her sires
Come to win back Helen lost.

MYRTILLA

There to her in that gray hour,
That gray hour before the sun,
Cometh he she waiteth for,
Menelaus like a ghost,
Like a dry leaf tempest-tost,
Stalking restless, her reproach.

PASIPHASSA

There alone, those two, long severed been,
Eye each other, one wild heart between.

SITYS

" O thou ruinous face,
O thou fatally fair,

O the pity of thee !
What dost thou there,
Watching the madness of me ? ”

CHTHONÆ

Him seemed her eyes were pools of dark
To drown him, yet no word she spake ;
But gazing, grave as a lonely house,
All her wonder thrilled to wake.

RHODOPE

“ By thy roses and snow,
By thy sun-litten hair,
By thy low bosom and slow
Pondered kisses, O hear !

“ By thy glimmering eyes,
By thy burning cheek,
By thy murmuring sighs,
Speak, Helen, O speak !

“ Ruinous Face, O Ruinous Face,
Art thou come so early,” he said,
“ So early forth from the wicked bed ? ”

GORGO

Him she pondered, grave and still,
Stirring not from her safe place :
He marked the glow, he felt the thrill,
He saw the dawn new in her face.

MYRTILLA

Within her low voice wailed the tone
Of one who grieves and prays for death :
“ Lord, I am come to be alone,
Alone here with my sorrow,” she saith.

PASIPHASSA

“ False wife, what pity was thine
For hearth and altar, for man and child ?
What is thy sorrow worth unto mine ? ”
She rocked, moaning, “ I was beguiled ! ”

SITYS

Ten years' woe for Troy and Greece
By her begun, the slim, the sweet,
Ended by her in final peace
Of him who loved her first of all ;
Nor ever swerved from his high passion,
But through misery and shame
Saw her spirit like a flame
Eloquent of her sacred fashion—
Hers whose eyes are homes of light,
To which she tends, from which she came.

GNATHO

GNATHO, Satyr, homing at dusk,
Trotting home like a tired dog,
By mountain slopes 'twixt the junipers
And flamed oleanders near the sea,
Found a girl-child asleep in a fleece,
Frail as wax, golden and rose ;
Whereat at first he skipt aside
And stayed him, nosing and peering, whereto
Next he crept, softly breathing,
Blinking his fear. None was there
To guard ; the sun had dipt in the sea,
Faint fire empurpled the flow
Of heaving water ; no speck, no hint
Of oar or wing on the main, on the deep
Sky, empty as a great shell,
Fainting in its own glory. This thing,
This rare breath, this miracle—
Alone with him in the world ! His
To wonder, fall to, with craning eyes
Fearfully daring ; next, since it moved not,
Stooping, to handle, to stroke, to peer upon
Closely, nosing its tender length,

Doglike snuffing—at last to kiss
In reverence wonderful, lightlier far
Than thistledown falls, brushing the Earth.
But the child awoke and, watching him,
cried not,
Cruddled visage, choppy hands,
Blinking eyes, red-litten, astare,
Horns and feet—nay, crowed and strained
To reach this wonder.

As one a glass
Light as foam, hued like the foam,
A breath-bubble of fire, will carry,
He in arms lifted his freight,
Looking wonderfully upon it
With scarce a breath, and humbleness
To be so brute ebbd to the flood
Of pride in his new assuréd worth—
Trusted so, who could be vile?

So to his cave in the wood he bore her,
Fleeting swift as a fear thro' the dark trees.

There in the silence of tall trees,
Under the soaring shafts,
Far beneath the canopied leafage,
In the forest whisper, the thick silences ;
Or on the wastes
Of sheltered mountains where the spires
Of solemn cypress frame the descent
Upon the blue, and open to sea—
Here grew Ianthe maiden slim

With none to spy but this gnarled man-brute ;
Most fair, most hid, like a wood-flower
Slim for lack of light ; so she grew
In flowering line of limb
And flower of face, retired and shy,
Urged by the bland air ; unknown,
Lonely and lovely, husbanding
Her great possessions—her's now,
Another's when he cared to claim them.
For thus went life : to lead the herds
Of pricking deer she saw the great stags
Battle in empty glades, then mate ;
Thus on the mountains chose the bears,
And in the woods she heard the wolves
Anguishing in their loves
Thro' the dense nights, far in the forest.
And so collected went she, and sure
Her time would come and with it her master.

But Gnatho watcht her under his brows
When she lay heedless, spilling beauty—
How ever lovelier, suppler, sleeker,
How more desirable, how near ;
How rightly his, how surely his—
Then gnaw'd his cheek and turn'd his head.

For unsuspect, some dim forbidding
Rose within him and knockt at his heart
And said, Not thine, but for reverence.
And some wild horror desperate drove him,
Suing a pardon from unknown Gods

For untold trespass, to seek the sea,
Upon whose shore, to whose cool breathing
He'd stretch his arms, broken with strife
Of self and self ; and all that water
Steadfast lapt and surged. Came tears
To furrow his cheeks, came strength to
return

To her, and bear with longer breath
Her sweet familiarities, blind
Obedience to nascent blind desire—
Till again he lookt and burn'd again.

Thus his black ferment boil'd. O' nights
He'd dream and revel frenziedly
As with the love-stung nymphs. Awake,
In a chill sweat, he'd tear at himself,
Claw at his flesh and leap in the brook,
Drench the red embers of his vice
Into a mass abhorred. Clean then,
He'd seek his bed and pass unscath'd
The bower of fern where the sleek limbs
Of white Ianthé, mesht in her hair,
Lay lax in sleep. But Gnatho now
Saw only God, as on some still peak
Snowy and lonely under the stars
We look, and see God in all that calm.

One night of glamour, under a moon
That seemed to steep the air with gold,
They two sat stilly and watcht the sea

Tremulously heaving over a path
Of light like a river of molten gold.
Warm blew the breeze to land ; she lean'd
Her idle head, idly played
Her fingers in his belt, and he
Embracing held her, yielding, subdued ;
Sideways saw the curve of her cheek,
Downcast lashes, droopt lip
Which seem'd to court his pleasure—

Then

On waves of fire came racing his needs
With zest of rage to possess and tear
That which his frenzy, maskt as love,
Courtied : so he lean'd to her ear,
Thrilled in torrents hoarse his case—
“ Love, I burn, I burn !
Slake me, love ! ” He raved in whisper.
And she lookt up with her wide full eyes,
Saying, “ My love ! ” and yielded herself.

Deep night settled on hill and plain,
The moon went out, the concourse of stars
Lay strewn above, and with golden eyes
Peered on them lockt. Far and faint
The great stags belled ; far and faint
Quested the wolves ; the leopards' howling
Lent desolation to night ; and low
The night-jar purr'd. At sea one light
Swayed restlessly, and on the rocks
Sounded the tireless lapping deep.
Lockt they lay thro' all the silences.

Dawn stole in with whimper of rain
And a wailing wind from the sea—
Gray sea, gray dawn and scurrying clouds
And scud of rain. The fisher boat,
The sands, the headlands fringed with broom
And tamarisk were blotted.

Alone,
Caged in the mist of earth
That beat his torment back to himself,
So that in vain he sought for the Gods,
And lifted up hands in vain
To witness this white wreck prone and still—
Gnatho the Satyr blinkt on his work.

1898-1912.

TO THE GODS OF THE COUNTRY

SUN and Moon, shine upon me ;
Make glad my days and clear my nights !

O Earth, whose child I am,
Grant me thy patience !

O Heaven, whose heir I may be,
Keep quick my hope !

Your steadfastness I need, O Hills ;
O Rain, thy kindness !

Snow, keep me pure ;
O Fire, teach me thy pride !

From you, ye Winds, I ask your blitheness !

1909.



FOURTEEN SONNETS

1896

ALMA SDEGNOSA

Not that dull spleen which serves i' the world
for scorn,

Is hers I watch from far off, worshipping
As in remote Chaldaea the ancient king
Adored the star that heralded the morn.

Her proud content she bears as a flag is borne
Tincted the hue royal ; or as a wing

It lifts her soaring, near the daylight spring,
Whence, if she lift, our days must pass
forlorn.

The pure deriving of her spirit-state
Is so remote from men and their believing,
They shrink when she is cold, and estimate
That hardness which is but a God's dismay :
As when the Heaven-sent sprite thro' Hell
sped cleaving,
Only the gross air checkt him on his way.

THE WINDS' POSSESSION

WHEN winds blow high and leaves begin to
fall,
And the wan sunlight flits before the blast ;
When fields are brown and crops are garnered
all,
And rooks, like mastered ships, drift wide
and fast ;
Maid Artemis, that feeleth her young blood
Leap like a freshet river for the sea,
Speedeth abroad with hair blown in a flood
To snuff the salt west wind and wanton free.

Then would you know how brave she is, how
high
Her ancestry, how kindred to the wind,
Mark but her flashing feet, her ravisht eye
That takes the boist'rous weather and feels it
kind :
And hear her eager voice, how tuned it is
To Autumn's clarion shrill for Artemis.

ASPETTO REALE

THAT hour when thou and Grief were first
acquainted

Thou wrotest, "Come, for I have lookt on
death."

Piteous I held my indeterminate breath
And sought thee out, and saw how he had
painted

Thine eyes with rings of black ; yet never
fainted

Thy radiant immortality underneath
Such stress of dark ; but then, as one that
saith,

"I know Love liveth," sat on by death
untainted.

O to whom Grief too poignant was and dry
To sow in thee a fountain crop of tears !

O youth, O pride, set too remote and high
For touch of solace that gives grace to men !
Thy life must be our death, thy hopes our
fears :

We weep, thou lookest strangely—we know
thee then !

KIN CONFESSED

LONG loving, all our love was husbanded
Until one morning on the brown hillside,
One misty Autumn morn when Sun did hide
His radiance, yet was felt. No words we
said,

But in one flash transfigured, glorified,
All her heart's tumult beating white and red,
She fell prone on her face and hid her wide
Over-brimmed eyes in dewy fern.

I prayed,
Then spake, "In us two now is manifest
That throbbing kindred whereof thou art
graft

And I the grafted, in this holy place."
She, turning half, with sober shame confest
Discovery, then hid her rosy face.

I read her wilding heart, and my heart
laught.

QUEL GIORNO PIÙ . . .

THAT day—it was the last of many days,
Nor could we know when such days might
be given
Again—we read how Dante trod the ways
Of utmost Hell, and how his heart was riven
By sad Francesca, whose sin was forgiven
So far that, on her Paolo fixing gaze,
She supt on his again, and thought it
Heaven,
She knew her gentler fate and felt it praise.

We read that lovers' tale ; each lookt at each ;
But one was fearless, innocent of guile ;
So did the other learn what she could teach :
We read no more, we kiss'd not, but a smile
Of proud possession flasht, hover'd a while
'Twixt soul and soul. There was no need for
speech.

ABSENCE

WHEN she had left us but a little while
Methought I sensed her spirit here and
there
About my house : upon the empty stair
Her robe brusht softly ; o'er her chamber
still
There lay her fragrant presence to beguile
Numb heart, dead heart. I knelt before
her chair,
And praying felt her hand laid on my hair,
Felt her sweet breath, and guess'd her wistful
smile.

Then thro' my tears I lookt about the room,
But she was gone. I heard my heart beat
fast ;
The street was silent ; I could not see her
now.
Sorrow and I took up our load, and past
To where our station was with heads bent low,
And autumn's death-moan shiver'd thro' the
gloom.

PRESENCE

WHEN she had left us but a little while,
I still could hear the ringing of her voice,
Still see athwart the dusk her shy half-smile
And that sweet trust wherein I most rejoice.

Then in her self-same tones I heard, "Go
thou,
Set to that work appointed thee to do,
Remembering I am with thee here and now,
Watchful as ever. See, my eyes shine true!"

I lookt, and saw the concourse of clear stars,
Steadfast, of limpid candour, and could
discover
Her soul look on me thro' the prison-bars
Which slunk like sin from such an honest
Lover :

And thro' the vigil-pauses of that night
She beam'd on me ; and my soul felt her
light.

DREAM ANGUISH

My thought of thee is tortured in my sleep—
Sometimes thou art near beside me, but a
cloud
Doth grudge me thy pale face, and rise to
creep
Slowly about thee, to lap thee in a shroud ;
And I, as standing by my dead, to weep
Desirous, cannot weep, nor cry aloud.
Or we must face the clamouring of a crowd
Hissing our shame ; and I who ought to
keep
Thine honour safe and my betrayed heart
proud,
Knowing thee true, must watch a chill doubt
leap
The tired faith of thee, and thy head
bow'd,
Nor budge while the gross world holdeth thee
cheap !
Or there are frost-bound meetings, and
reproach

At parting, furtive snatches full of fear ;
Love grown a pain ; we bleed to kiss, and
 kiss
Because we bleed for love ; the time doth
 broach
Shame, and shame teareth at us till we tear
Our hearts to shreds—yet wilder love for
 this !

HYMNIA-BEATRIX

BEFORE you pass and leave me gaunt and
chill

Alone to do what I have joyed in doing
In your glad sight, suffer me, nor take ill
If I confess you prize and me pursuing.
As the rapt Tuscan lifted up his eyes
Whither his Lady led, and lived with her,
Strong in her strength, and in her wisdom
wise,

Love-taught with song to be her thurifer ;

So I, that may no nearer stand than he
To minister about the holy place,
Am well content to watch my Heaven in
thee

And read my Credo in thy sacred face.

For even as Beatrix Dante's wreath did
bind,
So, Hymnia, hast thou imparadised my mind.

LUX E TENEBRIS

I THANK all Gods that I can let thee go,
Lady, without one thought, one base desire
To tarnish that clear vision I gained by fire,
One stain in me I would not have thee know.
That is great might indeed that moves me so
To look upon thy Form, and yet aspire
To look not there, rather than I should
mire
That wingéd Spirit that haunts and guards
thy brow.

So now I see thee go, secure in this
That what I have is thee, that whole of thee
Whereof thy fair infashioning is sign :
For I see Honour, Love, and Wholesomeness,
And striving ever to reach them, and to be
As they, I keep thee still ; for they are thine.

DUTY

OH, I am weak to serve thee as I ought ;
My shroud of flesh obscures thy deity,
So thy sweet Spirit that should embolden
me
To shake my wings out wide, serves me for
nought,
But receives tarnish, vile dishonour, wrought
By that thou camest to bless—O agony
And unendurable shame ! that, loving thee,
I dare not love, fearing my poisonous
thought !

Man is too vile for any such high grace,
For that he seeks to honour he can but mar ;
So had I rather shun thy starry face
And fly the exultation to know thee near—
For if one glance from me wrought thee a
scar
'Twould not be death, but life that I should
fear.

WAGES

SOMETIMES the spirit that never leaves me
quite

Taps at my heart when thou art in the way,
Saying, Now thy Queen cometh : therefore
pray,

Lest she should see thee vile, and at the sight
Shiver and fly back piteous to the light

That wanes when she is absent. Then, as
I may,

I wash my soiled hands and muttering, say,
Lord, make me clean ; robe Thou me in Thy
white !

So for a brief space, clad in ecstasy,
Pure, disembodied, I fall to kiss thy feet,
And sense thy glory throbbing round about ;
Whereafter, rising, I hold thee in a sweet
And gentle converse that lifts me up to be,
When thou art gone, strange to the gross
world's rout.

EYE-SERVICE

MESEEMS thine eyes are two still-folded lakes
Wherein deep water reflects the guardian
sky,
Searching wherein I see how Heaven is nigh
And our broad Earth at peace. So my Love
takes
My soul's thin hands and, chafing them, she
makes
My life's blood lusty and my life's hope
high
For the strong lips and eyes of Poesy,
To hold the world well squandered for their
sakes.

I looked thee full this day : thine unveiled
eyes
Rayed their swift-searching magic forth ;
and then
I felt all strength that love can put in men
Whenas they know that loveliness is wise.
For love can be content with no less prize,
To lift us up beyond our mortal ken.

CLOISTER THOUGHTS

(AT WESTMINSTER)

WITHIN these long gray shadows many dead
Lie waiting : we wait with them. Do you
believe
That at the last the threadbare soul will
give
All his shifts over, and stand dishevellèd,
Naked in truth? Then we shall hear it said,
“Ye two have waited long, daring to live
Grimly through days tormented ; now
reprieve
Awaiteth you with all these ancient dead !”

The slope sun letteth down thro' our dark
bars
His ladder from the skies. Hand fast in
hand,
With quiet hearts and footsteps quiet and
slow,
Like children venturous in an unknown land
We will come to the fields whose flowers are
stars,
And kneeling ask, “Lord, wilt Thou crown
us now ?”

THE CHAMBER IDYLL

THE blue night falleth, the moon
Is over the hill ; make fast,
Fasten the latch, I am tired : come soon,
Come ! I would sleep at last
In your bosom, my love, my love !

The airy chamber above
Has the lattice ajar, that night
May breathe upon you and me, my love,
And the moon bless our marriage-rite—
Come, lassy, to bed, to bed !

The roof-thatch overhead
Shall cover the stars' bright eyes ;
The fleecy quilt shall be coverlid
For your meek virginities,
And your wedding, my bride, my bride !

See, we are side to side,
Virgin in deed and name—
Come, for love will not be denied,
Tarry not, have no shame :
Are we not man and bride ?

1894.

EPIGRAMMATA

1910



THE OLD HOUSE

Mossy gray stands the House, four-square to
the wind,
Embosomed in the hills. The garden old
Of yew and box and fishpond speaks her
mind,
Sweet-ordered, quaint, recluse, fold within
fold
Of quietness ; but true and choice and
kind—
A sober casket for a heart of gold.

BLUE IRIS

Blue is the Adrian sea, and darkly blue
The Ægean ; and the shafted sun thro' them,
That fishes grope to, gives the beamy hue
Rayed from her iris's deep diadem.

THE ROSEBUD

In June I brought her roses, and she cupt
One slim bud in her hand and cherisht it,
And put it to her mouth. Rose and she
supt
Each other's sweetness; but the flower was
lit
By her kind eyes, and glowed. Then in her
breast
She laid it blushing, warm and doubly blest.

SPRING ON THE DOWN

When Spring blows o'er the land, and sun-
light flies
Across the hills, we take the upland way.
I have her waist, the wooing wind her eyes
And lips and cheeks. His kissing makes her
gay
As flowers. "Thou hast two lovers, O my
dear,"
Say I; and she, "He takes what thou dost
fear."

SNOWY NIGHT

The snow lies deep, ice-fringes hem the
thatch ;
I knock my shoes, my Love lifts me the
latch,
Shows me her eyes—O frozen stars, they
shine
Kindly ! I clasp her. Quick ! her lips are
mine.

EVENING MOOD

Late, when the sun was smouldering down
the west,
She took my arm and laid her cheek to me ;
The fainting twilight held her, and I guess'd
All she would tell, but could not let me
see—
Wonder and joy, the rising of her breast,
And confidence, and still expectancy.

THE PARTING

Breathless was she and would not have us
part :

“ Adieu, my Saint,” I said, “ ’tis come to
this.”

But she leaned to me, one hand at her heart,
And all her soul sighed trembling in a kiss.

DEDICATION OF A BOOK

To the Fountain of my long Dream,
To the Chalice of all my Sorrow,
To the Lamp held up, and the Stream
Of Light that beacons the Morrow ;

To the Bow, the Quiver and Dart,
To the Bridle-rein, to the Yoke
Proudly upborne, to the Heart
On Fire, to the Mercy-stroke ;

To Apollo herding his Cattle,
To Proserpina grave in Dis ;
To the high Head in the Battle,
And the Crown—I consecrate this.

1911.

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